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PANORAMA - WITH MUSIC

By the same author

THE PATRIOT KING
THE FIRST GENTLEMAN
THE CYPRIAN

and part author of

MODES AND MANNERS OF THE
NINETEENTH CENTURY



CHARLOTTE SENT HOME FOR A COURT GOWN

[*Gallery of Fashion* : London, 1798]

PANORAMA—WITH MUSIC

1774—1932

by

GRACE E. THOMPSON



*'I think every age moves to a different rhythm;
sometimes age, music and individual are in
perfect harmony; sometimes there are discords'*

JONATHAN CAPE
30 BEDFORD SQUARE LONDON

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CONTENTS

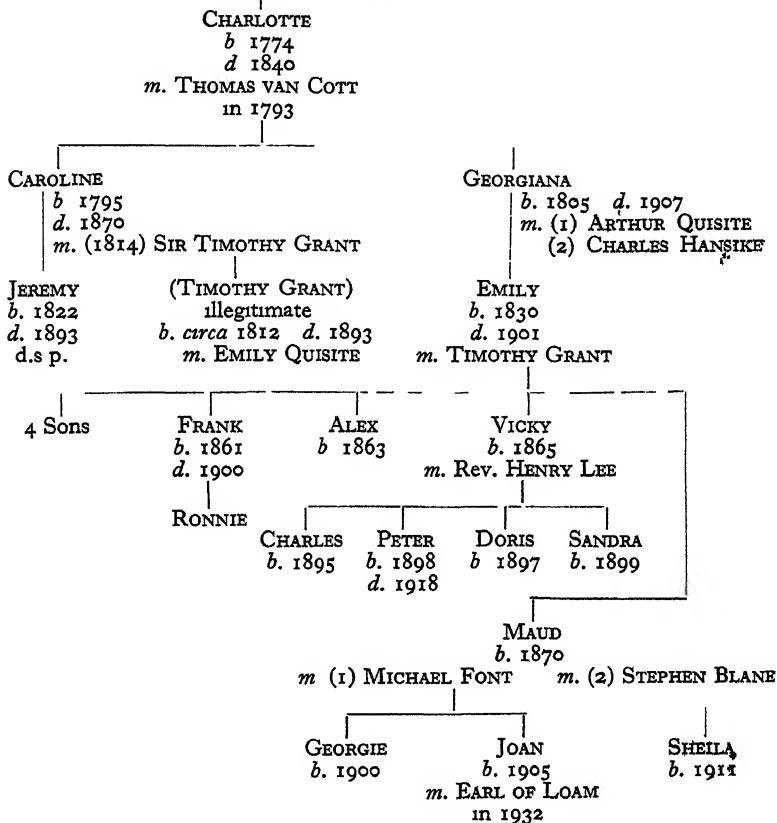
I	CHARLOTTE. b. 1774	11
	MINUET	
	Grétry: <i>Richard Cœur de Lion</i>	
II	CAROLINE. b. 1796	71
	WALTZ	
	Mozart: <i>Nozze di Figaro</i>	
III	GEORGIANA. b. 1805	115
	QUADRILLE	
	Weber: <i>Oberon</i>	
IV	EMILY. b. 1830	185
	POLKA	
	Meyerbeer: <i>Robert le Diable</i>	
V	MAUD. b. 1870	285
	<i>The Blue Danube</i>	
	Gilbert and Sullivan: <i>Patience</i>	
VI	GEORGIE AND JOAN. b. 1900 and 1905	307
	JAZZ	
	Richard Strauss: <i>Rosenkavalier</i>	

ILLUSTRATIONS

Charlotte sent home for a Court Gown (<i>Gallery of Fashion—London 1798</i>)	<i>Frontispiece</i>
Mr. Van Cott had a Zebra Waistcoat (<i>Journal des Dames—1790</i>)	<i>facing page 32</i>
Caroline chose a new Gown in Vienna (<i>Weiner Mode—1816</i>)	100
Arthur set up for a Beau (<i>Journal des Dames—1823</i>)	128
Georgiana's Walking Costume came from Vienna (<i>Wiener Zeitschrift—1825</i>)	158
Emily had a Winterhalter Gown (<i>Les Modes Parisiennes—1851</i>)	210
Maud had a new Walking Costume (<i>La Mode Artistique—1895</i>)	286
Georgie chose a Frock from <i>Vogue</i> (<i>Vogue Pattern No. 205</i>)	350

GENEALOGICAL TREE

SIR TERENCE O'DEANE *m.* LUCY BLACKWOOD widow of Sir Harry Blackwood



N O T E

THE members of this family are entirely fictitious, but since I have put them into a real world I have not removed real people from it, but have filled in the background from a number of contemporary letters and memoirs. I have particularly to thank Messrs. John Murray for permission to use the *Diary of Frances Lady Shelley* in this way.

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CHARLOTTE

Grétry: *Richard Cœur de Lion*



O Richard, o mon roi,
L'univers t'abandonne.

●

CHAPTER I

LONDON was, as usual, in a turmoil in the year in which Charlotte O'Deane was born. Mr. Alderman Wilkes was setting up for Lord Mayor of London, to the monstrous vexation of the King, who forgot, in troubles nearer at hand, that his rebellious colonists in America were making a prodigious fuss about a tax on tea.

Not that the King's anxieties were shared by Lady O'Deane; her only vexation was that the birth of her brat kept her from the faro table; she had, indeed, only left it an hour before she was brought to her bed, and returned there as soon as she could leave it. Sir Terence, in whom parental feeling was somewhat stronger, looked a little ruefully at the puling infant and sent it to the country with a buxom foster-mother, congratulating himself on the certainty that the brat was of his own begetting, a circumstance unusual and gratifying in his circle, where a man seemed to father every child except his own.

Lady O'Deane, who had had a son and a daughter whom she liked by her first marriage, regarded the only child of her unhappy second marriage alternately as a pest and a plaything, and saw as little of her as possible. When they met she called the child her 'lambkin', a term of endearment which Charlotte detested, and annoyed her by impetuous caresses, which were far more tiresome than long periods of neglect. Charlotte, however, was not much troubled by her mother; Lady O'Deane was devoted to cards, dress, and the world, and spent very short periods of time at the house in the country, on the borders of Devon and Somerset, where her younger daughter grew up as naturally as a young colt, and as wildly.

The child's father had quarters in the Temple, where he was

accustomed to lead a bachelor life which suited him much better than his country squiredom, or the company of his wife and daughter. When he did ride down into Somerset it was with some riotous boon companions who must see his small daughter set on a table after dinner to toss off her bumper of port.

Once - it was the last time Charlotte saw him - he came in gentler mood, and they rode out upon a fair spring morning on some business connected with the estate. Charlotte was six, and rode pillion before her father down the long hill which fell away from the house to the wood of birches which thrust up silver spears from the hollow at their feet. Sir Terence O'Deane would go fishing, but he must call at the old Dower House on the way. It was a long, low house in black and white, with the date 1625 carved over the door; Sir Terence did his business in the oak parlour, but the child was taken on a visit to the kitchen, where oatcakes hung in racks from the ceiling and fresh buttermilk brimmed in pannikins on the floor. A stout, good-natured woman with a red face poured out a mugful for her, wiped her mouth carefully, and handed her up to the strong arms which her father held out for her from his lofty seat on his shining black mare. Charlotte always kept that picture of him in her memory. It was the last time she saw him, and six months later she was told by a weeping governess that he was dead.

The governess cried too much, Charlotte told her mother, when Lady O'Deane came down to King's Wimborne in very irritable mood to pay the conventional respect of a few weeks of mourning for the husband whom she had detested, and to turn a remarkably shrewd eye upon the accounts of the estate. It was the last time she proposed to visit Somerset; the property was Charlotte's, and, nursed carefully through a long minority, might enable the girl to make a good match. She came to a very businesslike arrangement with one of those mushroom political peers who were a feature of King George's govern-

ment, and Charlotte did not see her home again for nearly thirty years.

The too tearful governess was dismissed and Charlotte sent to a school for small children near Richmond, where she might be sufficiently under her mother's eye for prudence, without being allowed to become a nuisance. Lady O'Deane's passion for cards grew deeper as the years passed, and the only rival emotion which struggled with it was a passion for her son, who was sowing a very liberal crop of wild oats, and found his mother's love vexatious.

Charlotte knew little of home and nothing of tenderness; that pillion ride to the Dower House remained all that she knew of love for many years, so that her father came to stand in her memory for the very pattern of a gentleman, despite his drunkenness and grossness and frequent bursts of almost maniacal rage; the child's instinct reached beyond these superficial matters to a heart which had been kind in essence and a nature tormented and distorted by conflict with one harsher than his own. So Charlotte cherished his memory as a green oasis in a very arid youth.

She was always in disgrace at school. She was wilful, headstrong and determined. Tokens of approval and disgrace were pinned on pupils' dresses: Charlotte always wore the darker badge. Her exasperated teachers could do nothing with her and, having relieved their feelings by blows and thrown books, were shamed by mocking curtsies from the insubordinate miss. She could be tamed by kindness, one found at last, and so tamed her; the child had a remarkably feeling heart. Led gently, Charlotte's deportment became a model for clumsier children; her progress in French and music was held up for the admiration of the dull. But it was in dancing that the child excelled; she was, the elder Miss Preston said, with a romantic twitter and head upon one side 'like thistledown floating in the wind'.

Lady O'Deane was doubtful if dancing of this quality should

be encouraged, it argued too much concentration on the dancing master's part, but her one desire was to be free of the brat, so finally she left the matter alone, and Charlotte practised steps with the earnestness of an opera dancer.

She saw and heard a little of the world, of course; there was a great deal of commotion in America, and her mother's friends held that the rebellious colonists were only serving King George as he deserved. Not that they really cared about the business; they were far more concerned with important matters nearer home, Mr. Fox's bets, for instance, and the latest scandal about the Prince of Wales. Charlotte pressed her nose against the windows of Mrs. Humphrey's shop in St. James's Street and gazed upon disrespectful drawings of the royal prodigals. There were Cipriani's drawings, too, of Cupids and garlands, and Lady Diana's paintings of peasants and children chained together by wreaths of natural flowers, very unlike anything Charlotte had seen in the country, but mighty pretty all the same; she had a strong liking for the printshop windows, which bored Betty, her mother's maid, but fortunately that was easily remedied in St. James's Street, where a pretty wench could be ogled by the beaux, so that Charlotte gazed at Mrs. Humphrey's windows without scoldings. Sir Joshua had painted the child herself, very engagingly, offering a garland to a bored and stupid lamb. She was much more diverted by the tiny portraits of a lovely eye which dangled by a ribbon from the button holes of beaux who thronged her mother's drawing rooms, and led to a merry game of inquisitions with sly winks:

'Who is it? Lord! don't you know?'

There were other diversions, of course, for her elders, in which a child's quick eye and ear might share; Mr. Walpole's whispered scandals, new balloon stories, talk of India and Mr. Hastings, Mr. Sheridan's eloquence, and the very strange tale of the Queen of France's jewels.

Lady O'Deane went everywhere, gave great card parties, went to vast Assemblies, thence to Ranelagh, returned at one

o'clock to dress for a guinea masquerade at the Opera House, came home to her bed at dawn, or later, and raked again next night. She moved in the Whig world, was an intimate of the Devonshire House circle and a bosom friend of Mrs. Crewe, gave dinners to Charles Fox and Richard Brinsley Sheridan, and supped with the Prince of Wales. But her politics were not exacting; she found the *ridotto* more diverting than the House, and had a thirst for pleasure unsurpassed even in that circle. As a friend remarked in her little daughter's hearing:

'She seems completely worn down by raking, but is always eager for the next labour.'

There was Mrs. Jordan to see at Drury Lane, and the Opera, and animal magnetism, and the philosophical fireworks, 'a most genteel performance, without smoke or noise but possessed of a strikingly unpleasant smell, highly fashionable,' and always there were cards, faro, casino, macao and quadrille, and a newish game called whist, growing rapidly into popularity, and, of course, French hazard.

Charlotte only caught glimpses of all these exciting occupations, but she had an inquiring mind, and Betty the maid was both talkative and friendly; there was very little that Charlotte did not know about her mother's games of cards.

When she was twelve there were alarmed whispers of a delicate chest.

'School,' the physician said, shaking his head dolefully, 'is no place for her.'

So Charlotte was sent with a governess to her half-brother's house near Bath, where she ran wild again, and made the acquaintance of some cousins a few years older than herself. She heard about their love affairs and browsed, enchanted, in her brother's library among his very odd collection of books, chiefly plays of the Restoration period, from which she spouted long parts before her mirror when she should have been in bed:

'To win a man, when all your arts succeed,
The way to keep him is a task indeed'

she wisely admonished her young cousins when they talked about their lovers. She also curdled their blood with Mr. Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* and other thrilling supernatural tales.

In country air she speedily outgrew her delicacy. Lady O'Deane, who could hardly spare a moment from the casino table, thought that the sooner she made a match for the girl, the sooner she could enjoy life by herself; she must begin those finishing touches which fitted a young lady for the world, a wearisome round of lessons in deportment, in singing, in drawing, in the dance; to the last alone Charlotte came willingly.

Lady O'Deane sighed, left her comfortable lodgings and opened a house which she owned not too inconveniently far from town. It stood back from the main road to the West, and had few neighbours; there was a row of villas close to the road, but otherwise the country was unspoilt; one could walk across the fields to Chelsea or Ranelagh, or drive along the main road, Sloane Street, which, although it was suburban on one side, with a long row of houses facing the street, still belonged to the country on the other, where the stream from Hyde Park gurgled happily, and over the fields was a fine view of the gardens round Buckingham House. With the turnpike at Hyde Park Corner London began, but on the other side of the turnpike, in spite of that threatening of suburbia, the country still stretched green and open, and children played happily in the fields.

Charlotte, in no hurry to be launched upon the town, played truant to be with them, and escape, when possible, from her mother's critical eye; but she could not escape for ever; her mother was determined to be rid of her, a good match if possible but a match of some kind should free her from this

encumbrance. It was not that she disliked the girl; she did not; but she had the rudiments of a conscience and was irked by obligations which she felt she must fulfil; it was the best thing for both of them that a husband should be found. Charlotte was charming, very obviously her mother's daughter and a child of the eighteenth century, sophisticated yet demure, but under her sophistication she had a shy sweetness which set her apart from her contemporaries. It charmed elderly rakes, to whom she turned a disdainful shoulder, and ineligible young gentlemen from the country, to whom she lent a too willing ear.

It was her duty to play at cards at her mother's casino table, and, from her seat opposite the closed window, she watched the summer sun slide down the sky. Cards bored her, and too much attention to romances had overwarmed her own romantic blood; she sighed and longed and looked for Prince Charming, who was to rescue her from her prison in this worldly tower. On all proposed matches she turned the shining eyes of idealistic youth; she felt, she whispered to herself, *le besoin d'âmer*, but no one reached her *beau idéal*. She fed her romantic dreams with poetry and novels, and read, surreptitiously, the works of Monsieur Rousseau, which were upsetting the established world. Lady O'Deane deplored this dreaming, and insisted on a greater interest in a practical world ruled by common sense and self-interest. If the child must read there was Mr. Gibbon's *History*, recently finished and very well thought of; there were, more suited to her youth, balls and operas and the new entertainment called 'Panoramas' which had come from Edinburgh, and, of course, there was conversation of the most improving kind, Mr. Fox's and that witty Mr. Sheridan's, who could keep a whole company in a roar. There were routs at the Duchess's, and suppers at Mrs. Crewe's to which two of the young Princes came drunk and talked so plain that most of the ladies fled from their side table, and Mrs. Sheridan would have followed them but did not escape till her

arms were black and blue and her apron torn off. Lady O'Deane was not shocked, naturally, but she shepherded her daughter into a side room till the Princes were gone. All this was education, quite necessary for a woman of the world; and as for a husband, that too was a necessity, and as much to be disregarded afterwards as drunkenness and lewd talk. The world was as it was, and no bad place either.

'Be sensible, Charlotte; leave dreaming till you have a husband and are tired of fashion and of love. Dreaming is for old age when pleasure has lost its savour.'

Rumours had drifted over the Channel that France was uneasy; the polite world paid no heed; but suddenly there was a crackle of musketry round the Bastille and even fashionable eyebrows were lifted inquiringly:

'Such odd goings on in Paris; what can it mean?'

They rustled their new gowns in Lady O'Deane's great drawing-room, with its soft sheen of satinwood and delicate harmony of brocades shimmering under the candlelight, which gleamed on some of Mr. Adams's 'gingerbread and embroidery' and on Cipriani's panels, a charming room. And the fashions that year were exquisite, a triumph for Rose Bertin and Queen Marie Antoinette. As they gathered round the card tables they paused for quite five minutes to discuss the disturbing news from France.

'I always knew that trouble would result from those subversive books of Monsieur Rousseau,' said Lady O'Deane indignantly, picking up the cards.

Charlotte, in a new gown of rose and silver, listened with bright eyes, but the interest shifted quickly to casino, and she was forced to take her place.

Her freshness and charm appealed to the ancient gamesters who lounged round her mother's card table, but she would have none of the elderly, obese gentlemen or withered roués whom her mother selected as matches suitable for her; she was fastidious, and the husbands offered always appeared to her too coarse

or old. There was a painful scene when she rejected the fifth of them, and, in disgrace, she was sent once more into exile at Bath to bring her to her senses.

Her half-brother was kind, but casual; Charlotte roamed when and where she pleased, and, unattended, except by a slavishly devoted groom, rode far afield. A toss from her horse introduced her to Mr. Theodore Combe. He sprang to the rescue and sent the contrite groom in search of the straying horse, a search which took some time. Charlotte was very little hurt, and it would have been churlish to refuse to converse with one's rescuer. The groom was discreet and sympathetic; Mr. Combe was frequently in attendance after that; it was odd how often his way, quite by chance, of course, happened to be theirs.

Such meetings could not pass unremarked for ever, and the tale of them came to Lady O'Deane's ears at last. She hurried down to Bath in a vindictive temper, which she managed to control. It was worse than she thought; Mr Theodore Combe, with £200 a year from his father, a small West Country squire, and his way to make in the world, had made so deep an impression on the silly child's heart that her mother was forced to desert the card table to deal seriously with her daughter's suitor; it was no good being too harsh, or they would be off in a post-chaise to the Savoy Chapel or Gretna Green.

Lady O'Deane was tactful; she liked the boy, and wrote him a most carefully considered letter:

'I am not surprised that Charlotte likes you, but, my dear Theodore, I wish you to consider how is she, as your wife, to be provided for? A young lady who shines in the first circles must expect to have an establishment suited to the situation she has been brought up in, which at this moment, I lament to say, you have not the power to offer her, although you may in a few years be more fortunate. But, my dear Theodore, you have too much honour in your disposition to go further in this

matter until your situation is altered. I can with truth say that if I had it in my power to assist you to make proper arrangements I should do it immediately, but you know, my dear Theodore, how limited my powers are, and that I have nothing to aid you. As a man of delicacy and honour I depend upon you to consider Charlotte's welfare first.'

Lady O'Deane had a very moving interview with the young man, but she thought it prudent to forbid a meeting between him and Charlotte. Young Mr. Combe took service with the East India Company and sailed away out of Charlotte's life on the day that lovelorn damsel was drying her eyes to dance at a ball given by her mother to celebrate her seventeenth birthday. She enjoyed herself moderately, of course, since she was seventeen and dancing was her first passion, but she wept into her pillow when the ball was done.

Lady O'Deane reluctantly bestirred herself to take more definite steps to settle her daughter, for, careless as she was, she could not permit such an imprudence as the Combe affair, and must avoid another such tangle. She took counsel with her friend the Duchess of Devonshire, and Charlotte was admitted to a closer intimacy with that circle of charming young people who whirled and sparkled round Duchess Georgiana with no other object in life than to be amused, and who romped, not always decorously, in the magnificent apartments of Devonshire House.

Charlotte was not wholly at her ease in that atmosphere; it was too full of gush and tinkle; in spite of her beauty her silence set her too much in the background; she had none of the qualities that would make her a leader in that set. Yet, perhaps because of her strangeness, though it was notorious that he did not usually care for young girls, the Prince of Wales singled her out by his attentions. He lived a good deal with the Whigs of the Devonshire House set; he was fond of the Duchess and of the convivial company of Charles James Fox. He liked to flirt with the pretty women he found there, and he was a con-

noisseur of food and wines, so he was often at the intimate little parties which the Duchess loved, where he could have abundance of these things. He was a good-looking man with a fine figure and agreeable manners, with sufficient intelligence to attune himself to his company, and a real desire to please. Charlotte was undoubtedly flattered; her mother was worried lest she should lose her head over him; the girl grew conspicuous, undesirably so. Charles Fox himself squeezed her hand; Sheridan paid her compliments enough to turn her pretty head, and the Prince of Wales's ardour undoubtedly increased, a sentimental look, an impressive 'My pretty Charlotte', a kiss on either cheek. Too late for her daughter's reputation Lady O'Deane saw the danger and took alarm. It was not the dishonourable nature of the Prince's proposals which disturbed her, but the extremely evanescent quality of his previous affairs; a few years as the Prince's mistress might be advantageous, but a few weeks held no practical advantage to one of her daughter's birth; if his fancy were lasting he might pursue it profitably when Charlotte was safely established with a husband of her own. The girl, belatedly, was snatched from the danger, — her mother being careful not to inquire too closely whether her prudence had been exercised in time — and dispatched to the care of a great aunt who was taking the waters at Bath and might be trusted to make a more alert dragon of virtue than her brother; sentimental memories of Mr. Combe, now safely in Bengal, might be depended on to drive the Prince's attentions from her mind.

Charlotte, whose observation of her mother had cured her of any tendency to docility which her disposition might have held, went to Bath protesting angrily, and promptly fell into more mischief with an elderly beau who had graduated under Beau Nash. The chit had no care for her reputation, but her sparkling charm, from which all shy sweetness had vanished, brought many moths to flutter round her flame, among them Mr. Thomas van Cott from Bengal, a nabob worth many lacs

of rupees, Aunt Caroline reported, of passable birth, and not at all unattractive, who was laying serious siege to the wilful beauty; Charlotte appeared to like him very well, though she laughed at his pretensions.

Lady O'Deane, while deploring his lack of family, which might, however, have been much more completely lacking than it was, for his origin was quite respectable, though undistinguished, inclined a very favourable ear to his pleadings, and sternly ordered her daughter to accept the worthy man.

Charlotte refused, very rudely, and after a period of bread and water, was removed to a little country cottage near Richmond where a spinster cousin with a disposition of vinegar might be counted upon to discipline the rebel into a state of mind when any escape would be preferable to this sour companionship.

They reckoned without Charlotte and her incurable longing for romance. The French refugees were pouring into Richmond and its neighbourhood, romantic young aristocrats with melancholy eyes. Charlotte's heart was all aflutter over their sad, exciting tales. She listened very intently to young André de Sombreuil, who was too young to join the army himself but who talked of his hero brother, Charles, who had been of the Guards and mounted the white cockade in the room of the Palace of Versailles when they had sworn to defend the Queen.

'Do you know Grétry's *Richard Cœur de Lion*?' he asked the wide-eyed girl. She did; they had played it at the Opera.

'The band played "O Richard, o mon roi" as they fastened their white cockades. Charles is with the army in La Vendée. I hope to join him soon.'

But, since, across a room, André de Sombreuil's dark eyes had met those wide blue ones, he was less eager to begone to Brittany, for his heart was caught in the snare of a girl's gold hair.

Charlotte was radiant. All round her cousin's rural cottage

were farms and gardens and orchards, which conveniently provided the fruit and cream for the syllabubs for the Arcadian parties given to remind the émigrés of the Petit Trianon and Marie Antoinette, delightfully artificial entertainments with their mixture of rural simplicity and elaborate manners and clothes, the bowing gentlemen in brocades and lace ruffles and the curtsying ladies in sweeping silk and satin gowns, with the great plumed hats which Mr. Gainsborough painted so enchantingly.

Charlotte O'Deane went to these rustic entertainments, and prinked and curtsyed as demurely as the other young ladies, blushed at compliments, and listened, politely, to Horace Walpole's witty, malicious sallies, as he hobbled about on his legs like peewits'; but sometimes her attention wandered most shockingly to the wild flowers and the birds. She would slip away into an orchard and gaze in a wistful dream at the heavy blossom, and, as the summer nights grew warmer, she would steal out secretly at night to listen to the nightingale and whisper sentimentally

'Sweet bird that shun'st the noise of folly.'

M. Rousseau's subversive books had completely corrupted her. André de Sombreuil stole softly between the tree trunks to join her. They were far from eavesdroppers, for country folk went early to bed, and, in the intervals of kissing, the young man, who had a very fine baritone much acclaimed in the royalist song, 'O Richard, o mon roi' which he sang in the exiles' drawing-rooms, chanted most romantically another air from *Richard*:

Qu'elle est gentille, ma bergère,
Quand elle court dans le vallon,
O c'est vraiment un Papillon,
Ses pieds ne touchent pas à terre,
Je l'attrape quoique légère.

Hé, puis nous nous parlons tous bas
Que je vous plains vous ne la verrez pas.

This wooing was such stuff as dreams are made of, and even they knew it could not last, but in lives which, despite their youth, had held much misery they had glimpsed perfection and pursued it, stretching out imploring hands, and, for a moment, holding the Butterfly, delicately, in their palms. More fortunate than most they possessed Beauty for an hour.

Richmond was in the first request that summer. Mrs Bouverie was settled there with a large court, the Sheridans sparkled on green lawns, and the Bunburys. Old Queensberry came and went, and most of Lady O'Deane's Whig friends drove down with a quizzical eye for her wilful daughter, who had so nearly (or was it completely?) captured the Prince.

Horace Walpole was in his element, tottering from group to group with sippets of gossip.

'Princes are so rife now,' said he with a sly glance for Charlotte, 'that besides my sweet nephew in the Park we have another at Richmond. The Duke of Clarence is in Mr. Henry Hobart's house.'

Someone ventured a disastrous contradiction, shivering a little under Mr. Walpole's chilly stare, but the gossip soon hurried away with his amended tale.

'The Duke of Clarence is already weary of a house in the middle of a village with nothing but a short green apron to the river,' he reported to a neighbouring group. 'A situation only fit for an old gentlewoman who has put out her knee-pads and loves cards.'

That sounded better; he savoured the phrase, very good for someone in the country; who should have a letter to use up so telling a phrase? It fell a little flat in his present company; indeed, he received less than his usual attention. The émigrés were deep in a discussion of the expedition to Brittany which was to set sail from Torbay under Lord Howe. Mr. Walpole,

in company with the rest of the world of fashion, was a little tired of all this talk of France. He was very shocked, of course, to hear that the French King had been beheaded by that dreadful machine — Mr. Gillray was almost too realistic in his pictures of it — but Mr. Pitt was taking the affair too seriously and becoming quite a bore.

Autumn followed summer very kindly that year, dying in a golden warmth. It was on a night in late October that André de Sombreuil stole into Charlotte's orchard with the news of the horrible tragedy of the Queen of France. He kissed his love tenderly, but he was in no mood for dalliance; the royalists in La Vendée were not demolished as was reported, and he must join them now. He must leave his Charlotte, unless, indeed, she loved him enough to consent to a runaway marriage?

They knew it was useless to expect sympathy from their elders, so they arranged an elopement to Gretna Green.

Charlotte was enchanted. How could one expect prudence from a young man who had escaped by a hair's breadth from the guillotine and was going now to face Death anew? How could one expect decorum from a minx whose every generous impulse had been thwarted? They had not a hundred guineas between them, but Charlotte slid down an improvised rope fastened to her chamber window, and found her André waiting for her in a coach. A score of times they had met so without detection, but, since Fortune frowned upon Romance for Charlotte, this night they were unfortunate, were missed, and overtaken before they had gone one hour's journey on the road to the north.

The weeping girl was brought back to a stricter confinement. There were no more secret meetings in a moonlit orchard, no stolen kisses, no words exchanged at all. Sometimes blue eyes and brown ones met despairingly across the length of a room; sometimes, even, passionate lips touched a trembling little hand at meeting or parting, but only under a dozen inimical pairs of eyes. Vaguely Charlotte heard talk of a fresh expedition into

Brittany, and of youthful volunteers. It came as a desolating shock when she heard at Lady Lucan's that Lord Moira was to sail almost at once with great force.

'St. Malo is supposed to be the object, but no doubt that has not been told,' said one.

'He certainly carries ten thousand men and four hundred émigrés from Jersey,' supplemented another. 'The French *monoculus* General Conway goes with him. I heard of no other of the refugees.'

'Lord Moira's behaviour is noble. He offered himself for this service some months ago.'

Horace Walpole smirked. 'I found the Comte de Coigni at Madame de Boufflers. He was to set out the next morning to join Lord Moira's expedition as a common soldier. This sounds decent and well, but one may guess that he had squeezed a little Frenchism into his intention and had asked for a vessel and some soldiers to attend him.'

Mr. Walpole had a way of stripping the noblest impulses of their fineness. Charlotte's lip curled as she listened. There was a sound at the door; she turned her head. A tall young man had come into the room and stood in the shadow, leaning negligently against a screen. Lady Lucan crossed the floor to speak to him, and a Frenchwoman beside him touched the strings of her harp. The passion in André de Sombreuil's voice startled the gossips into silence:

O Richard, o mon roi,
L'univers t'abandonne.
Sur la terre il n'est donc que moi
Qui s'intéresse à ta personne.
Moi seul dans l'univers
Voudrais briser tes fers
Et tous le reste t'abandonne.
O Richard, o mon roi
L'univers t'abandonne.

A servant came in hurriedly and spoke to Lady Lucan, who touched the singer on the arm. André de Sombreuil nodded, and stood suddenly at Charlotte's side.

'The courier has arrived to summon me for the expedition to Bretagne,' he said. 'I must go.' He bent over the hand which lay lifeless in his, pressed his lips to it, and was gone.

The melancholy young man had set off on one of those desperate adventures into Brittany from which they never seemed to return. *He* did not; he was made prisoner soon after the landing, and was shot at Vannes.

CHAPTER II

CHARLOTTE was changed. This last love was a real love, and, by its spoiling, had grown lasting. Never through all the rest of her life could she hear the song 'O Richard, o mon roi' without a quiver of grief. Even her mother saw, with angry sympathy, that the girl was stricken, but something had to be done about her future; the very depth of her sorrow ensured the docility which came from indifference. Lady O'Deane was out of patience with her; since persuasion had been ineffective she must try compulsion; sorry as she was for the child's pain, romantic notions could not be allowed to interfere with practical arrangements.

Mr. Thomas van Cott, still lingering in England and in cautious communication with Lady O'Deane, was only too ready to renew his proposals; although the girl had tarnished her reputation with these escapades, he found himself quite unable to forget her.

He came to call at the little house at Richmond, from which Charlotte would have been glad to escape even into a prison cell; every brick, every tree, every blade of grass spoke to her of André, of murdered hope and love. Mr. Van Cott was no worse than any other. Lady O'Deane received him, after she had had a frank, almost brutal, talk with her daughter. The alternatives set before the girl were dreary in the extreme; listlessly she consented to an immediate marriage.

Mr. Van Cott, who had not risked a rebuff from the girl until he had been assured by her mother of her acquiescence, greeted Charlotte with a formal politeness which did not, at least, rouse her active hostility. He told her that he had agreed

with the captain for the whole of the round house and half the great cabin, and that the ship would be sailing for India in about ten days; he trusted that she would not find it too great an inconvenience to be ready by then?

Charlotte made one last effort: there must be an outfit; she had no clothes; these things took time.

Mr. Van Cott turned inquiringly to her mother. Lady O'Deane reassured him; she would see to all that.

'My daughter shall be ready in time, believe me, my dear sir; these things can be managed, though the gentlemen always profess to doubt it,' she said archly.

Lady O'Deane was extremely competent on such occasions. It was not as if clothes came from Paris any longer; there were no fashions from France; all the ladies were too busy with their politics, and Mademoiselle Rose Bertin had gone to Vienna. England had to evolve her own fashions. She appeared to have done so most startlingly, Mr. Van Cott thought; he was accustomed to ladies in voluminous gowns, and the sudden revival of classical fashions brought a blush to his very ruddy cheek. The Duchess of York was enceinte, and the patriotic ladies of England, to keep her in countenance, adopted enthusiastically a mode which decreed that the devotees of fashion should show their abhorrence of revolutions and their devotion to the throne by wearing little cushions under the front of their waistbands, which rose to their armpits. Poets, of a kind, were enchanted with the new fashion and sang about it:

'Shepherds, I have lost my waist,
Have you seen my body?'

'A change in fashion, my dear, to be a success must be a complete one,' said the leaders. 'For many years too many clothes have certainly been worn.'

So away went corsets and underpetticoats, and, one by one, all other undergarments vanished, until only gown and trans-



MR VAN COTT HAD A ZEBRA WAISTCOAT

[*Journal des Dames* 1790]

parent chemise remained. The fashion, artistically speaking, was ravishing upon sylphlike forms, but poor Mr. Van Cott, who was conservative and had a very strong sense of propriety – the result of his undistinguished origin, no doubt – found it most distressing to contemplate upon forms which weighed fifteen stone or more. However, while he was being fitted for some of the zebra waistcoats which exquisite young gentlemen were affecting that year, Lady O'Deane speedily collected a trousseau of the new, insubstantial, kind for her daughter. It was, undoubtedly, very comfortable garb for a sultry climate; Charlotte looked ravishing in it, and Mr. Van Cott's eyes grew hot.

Lady O'Deane gave her daughter her blessing and some good advice.

'You might have done worse, child. Make the best of your position and enjoy the fortune which Mr. Van Cott proposes to lavish on you, I perceive. He is presentable and generous; he will make a very tolerable husband, I have no doubt. Once married you may have as many affairs, discreetly conducted, of course, as you like. But remember, a husband likes his first born to be his own.'

They were married at six o'clock of a winter evening in the great drawing-room of Sir Harry Blackwood's town house, which he opened up for the benefit of his half-sister, to give her a good send-off into the matrimonial seas which were causing himself a deal of queasiness. The Prince sent his good wishes, and the Duchess of Devonshire set the seal of her approval on the marriage by lending them the Duke's great Palladian house at Chiswick for the night. Lady O'Deane kissed her pale and drooping daughter, and Sir Harry thrust his brother-in-law into the coach beside his bride with a clap on the back and a jest more apt than delicate.

Charlotte was quite silent during the drive to Chiswick. Mr. Van Cott fidgeted and cleared his throat; he wanted to say something comforting but could think of no suitable words.

They exchanged a few remarks before the servants as they sat at supper, but as Charlotte rose from table she turned wide, imploring eyes upon her husband.

'I am so tired,' she said piteously, her hand at her throat.

With a delicacy with which no one would have credited him he bent over the hand she put unwillingly in his.

'Good-night, my dear,' he said gently. 'Sleep well.'

Next morning they set out for Portsmouth, and at four in the afternoon arrived at the George Inn, where they found the captain of the Indiaman, his wife and her two sisters, who were going out to India in search of husbands.

They had a pleasant run down the Channel, but in the Bay of Biscay experienced some boisterous weather. Fortunately the wind was driving them at an immense rate. Charlotte was very seasick, and her physical misery helped to dull her agony of mind; Mr. Van Cott was courteous and patient, but he was her owner and always at her side; she could not forgive him for it.

The *Thetis* made a record passage to the Cape, and put into False Bay amid a twittering of female passengers eager once more to be on land. The Indiaman carried a record number of ladies that trip; there was Lady Shore with one daughter, about thirteen years of age, a merry, pretty child, five daughters of Sir Charles Blunt, and the same number of General Brisco's, all very fine, showy, dashing girls dressed in the very latest fashions; India was regarded as a happy hunting ground for husbands; any girl of spirit who could manage it and who found life dull at home, contrived to find a friend or relative to take her on a visit to that delectable shore where she might put out a fishing line.

The ladies created something of a sensation in Cape Town, where the latest fashion had not hitherto been seen. A soft-hearted Dutchman was quite upset about it when he saw all these young ladies at a ball.

'Oh, God help their poor parents,' he exclaimed, with great

feeling. 'How miserable must they be upon perceiving the situation their daughters are in.'

The captain of the *Thetis*, to whom the remark was addressed, burst out laughing when he saw the error into which the Dutchman had fallen. He recovered his gravity to remark:

'I do not think the young ladies' parents have any cause for anxiety.' He gave the bystanders a sly wink.

'Mein Gott!' the Dutchman exclaimed in horror. 'No reasonable cause of uneasiness? Is it not apparent that they are all with child?'

All the ladies giggled, and the men laughed heartily, but it was with great difficulty that the Dutchman was persuaded that his suspicions were without foundation, and that the ladies had made themselves look absurd and indecent at the behest of Fashion; Dutch women were not such fools.

Charlotte Van Cott enjoyed the joke as much as anyone. She had been delighted to reach Cape Town and find herself once more on shore. The passengers had made the journey from False Bay to Cape Town in some very odd conveyances which had made her laugh, particularly at the agonized expressions on the faces of the elderly as they jolted over the rocky and abominable road. Charlotte was like a child playing truant as she romped with the other girls and forgot that she was married, and that her love was dead. They spent their time very pleasantly, visiting and admiring the beautiful scenery. In the morning and evening she walked in the Company's Gardens, which were full of curious plants and had the finest menagerie in the world. In the evening there was generally dancing, and her performance was pronounced ravishing.

They stayed a fortnight in Cape Town before they were summoned back to the ship. Charlotte, who, relieved from the too close attendance of her husband, had recovered her spirits at Cape Town, sank into apathy once more when they returned on board. She had had this fate thrust upon her; she must submit, but she had no intention of making the best of it; in her

heart burned a sullen discontent. She had nothing to say to Mr. Van Cott, and made it very evident that she disliked his company — a state of mind, of course, not at all remarkable in a wife and hardly arousing comment among onlookers, who would have been vastly diverted to know that Mr. Van Cott had the kindest of hearts and was feeling deeply grieved. Never talkative, it seemed now that the girl had no tongue in her head at all; the poor man had the most miserable voyage of his life.

Fortunately it was a short one; the *Thetis* anchored in Balasore Roads after a remarkably quick, fine passage. They went ashore in an odd looking Bengal boat called a paunceway, which interested Charlotte, and at five o'clock in the morning came in sight of Garden Reach. Charlotte, hiding her interest under her customary mask of bored indifference, was very pleasantly surprised at the beauty of the scene. At nineteen it is difficult to be completely indifferent, and, riding alone in her palankeen, she let the mask slip for a moment and looked about her with bright eyes. Calcutta looked exciting, she thought; but the weather being very hot in the city, Mr. Van Cott hurried his bride away to his bungalow at Chinsurah, which was, perhaps, a mistake, for the novelty of the life in Calcutta might have roused the girl from her self-absorption, whereas a continuous honeymoon solitude with a man she was determined to dislike, increased her sullen resentment; she was not yet of an age to be won by the kindness of the strange man to whose possession she had been handed over with no more consideration than if she had been a doll. He knew nothing of such natures, nothing, indeed, of women, save of the basest sort; his virtues were real, solid, but not of a kind she knew or could, so inexperienced was she for all her sophistication, divine. There was a great deal to make life endurable, even enjoyable, for those whose dispositions knew anything of contentment, but Charlotte had made up her mind to be unhappy, and unhappy she would be. The root of her misery was genuine enough, but

its surface was a bitter resentment; she had wanted to nurse her aching heart in solitude; in that wish her mother and Mr. Van Cott had thwarted her; her mother was out of reach of her resentment; the double portion fell on the unfortunate man who had been so ill-advised as to buy her, though his intention and desire was to make her happy. She sat at his table like a beautiful wax doll, inanimate and scornful. Mr. Van Cott, both amiable and patient, regarded her with an imperturbable good humour, and some pity, which he was discreet enough to hide.

He kept a lodging in Calcutta, where he passed much of his time, and would sometimes carry his unwilling wife there for a few days to see and be seen.

She was not entirely a stranger to the society, having several acquaintances among the company who frothed at the top of the Bengal fashionable world. Sir Robert Abercrombie, the Commander-in-Chief, was an old friend of her mother, but he was in disgrace with the Europeans of the settlement, and had been censured for a shameful peace which he had concluded with the Rohillas, 'a bloody, ill-conducted campaign, as disgraceful to the General in his diplomatic as in his military character', said Mr. Van Cott with some heat. This, of course, was quite enough to determine Charlotte on the defence of the General, as a gentleman on whom one of Mr. Van Cott's low origin could hardly be in a position to express an opinion. Nevertheless, all Calcutta censured his conduct, it appeared, until, after his return there, he gave ten thousand rupees to be distributed among the widows and children of the private soldiers and sepoys who fell in this fatal business, when his liberality reinstated him in public esteem. Charlotte curled her lip at the society of Calcutta, which could be so easily placated; it consisted, she found, of the immensely wealthy and a constantly augmented stream of ne'er-do-wells, for the East India Company's service was the last resource of ruined profligates.

Mr. Van Cott was both popular and respected, but unfortunately he aimed at being a beau and was very splendid in his apparel, with spangles, lace and foil, and the zebra waistcoats which had been so sensational in London; Charlotte, whose good taste decreed simplicity, sneered at his splendour, to his great discomfort. He was a good-looking man of thirty-five, of medium height, but inclined to be rotund; his hair, which, of course, he wore powdered, was of a bright chestnut; his complexion was florid, and his eyes were very blue. Charlotte's gold and porcelain looked pale beside his ruddiness, but they made a handsome couple, and he had good-nature enough for two. The disdain with which she regarded him did not extend to all his possessions; she appreciated his fine Arabian saddle-horses and the handsome phaeton with its spirited pair in which she drove out recklessly, as if there were no other traffic on the roads. Speed, speed — there was some comfort for her heartbreak in it.

'You will break your neck,' her husband warned her.

'That would be no great matter,' she answered scornfully. 'Life is not so great a boon.'

Mr. Van Cott kept his temper. He was much alarmed, and he begged her to give up riding for a time. His entreaties being useless, he issued orders to the grooms. His marriage had brought him neither happiness nor comfort; at least it should give him a healthy child. Sulkily, his wife obeyed because she must.

He was more often in Calcutta, but, if she might not ride or drive, she preferred Chinsurah, and spent many weeks up there alone.

In the autumn of 1795 her daughter Caroline was born. With the coming of the child her hardness seemed to melt a little, if not towards her husband, at least towards his world. Her acquaintances came up the river to visit her, and bring the latest news; French privateers were attacking the Indiamen, so daring were they that a dirty little pariah sloop with only three

small guns came to the mouth of the river Hooghley and captured two of the Company's pilot schooners which had considered themselves out of all danger. The state of the Company's army in Bengal was truly alarming, the conduct of a large proportion of the officers being very little short of open and declared mutiny.

'The Calcutta militia has been embodied in all haste,' fluttered the ladies. 'And Sir Robert Abercrombie is to be dispatched in an effort at pacification.'

'There is a general panic in Calcutta, my dear Charlotte; amongst both black and white, and everybody is going about with alarmed faces.'

Charlotte was quite unconcerned. She sat on her veranda at Chinsurah and played with her baby, and cared not one jot for the rest of the world. Mr. Van Cott had recently purchased some ground there, about a hundred yards from the river, in a delightful situation, with a wide outlook over the Dutch Governor's park and close to the estate of his friend, Mr. Hickey; he proposed to build a fine house of three stories. For the first time Charlotte displayed an interest in something which concerned her husband.

Mr. Van Cott was gratified; champagne and claret, not always judiciously mixed, might give him convivial hours, but he was a sad and disillusioned man. He had the prettiest wife in Bengal; the fact gratified his vanity, but his heart was sore, for when he purchased her from her mother he had very warmly hoped for companionship, and behind his dry shyness in her presence, had cherished a dream that kindness might win affection at last. His dream had faded before the marriage was two years old; his child consoled him. Caroline was so incredibly handsome an infant that when she went out airing she was always followed by a crowd. Charlotte's listlessness had given way to a very firm determination. She had theories on the subject of babies — Heaven alone knew where she had obtained them, for in her mother's world babies were never

anything but a prodigious bore, to be ignored and forgotten — and intended to follow them in the face of all the opposition in the world. Caroline was washed with cold water from head to foot every morning, never had a cloth put on hot, and was as near naked as decency permitted, never being swathed, and kicking her legs and waving her arms with a great deal of vigour and enjoyment. It was revolutionary, almost improper, but it worked. Everyone shook a dismal head and prophesied disaster; Caroline flourished and grew.

^ Mrs. Van Cott, absorbed in her baby, hardly noticed how swiftly the years passed. Caroline was learning to walk and talk a little in the spring of 1797. Charlotte, much improved by the joy she found in her motherhood, went out a little more that year. She considered that the quality of Calcutta society was improving; in March Sir Alured Clarke arrived, and his manners were quite those of a gentleman. Mr. Van Cott made friends with him at once. St. Patrick's Day was celebrated with much hilarity, Colonel Wellesley presiding at the dinner and doing the duties of the chair with peculiar credit to himself. Colonel Wellesley was certainly a great asset, Charlotte found. Distinguished visitors were thick as spring blossoms that year, and included a bosom friend of the Prince of Wales, Major-General John St. Leger, who had been very intimate with Lady O'Deane.

Mr. Van Cott entertained them all at Chinsurah. Large dinner parties and sumptuous entertainments were given by all the gentlemen of Calcutta for this boon companion of the Prince, who still drank freely and never would flinch from the bottle in jovial society. Mrs. Van Cott kept to her own apartments during these sprees, except in the early morning, when she sat with Caroline on the veranda and was ironically amused by the inanities of the conversation of her invisible guests.

While the gentlemen were at billiards one morning she suddenly heard General St. Leger cry out:

'What a delicious smell there is. Who is smoking? I never

smelt better tobacco and should like to try it. Can you not get me a whiff from one of the servants?’

Mr. Van Cott thought he must be joking, for so elegant a man could surely never have been in the habit of using so vulgar a herb.

‘Very nice perfume, indeed,’ he said sarcastically. ‘But the operator is a guest, not a servant of mine.’

General St. Leger was quite serious.

‘Upon my soul there is nothing in the world I should like so much as a pipe,’ he said. ‘I learned to smoke when serving with the Duke of York with the army upon the continent. We were frequently encamped upon low marshy ground and the physicians recommended the use of tobacco as conducive to health.’

So elegant a performer set a cachet upon the practice, hitherto considered vulgar in the extreme. Mr. Van Cott speedily became an adept at a cheroot or a pipe. His wife, wrinkling her delicate nose at the foul odour, decided, nevertheless, that his new habit improved her husband. It made him more at ease in the company of men of fashion, less restless in hers, for she begged him, a little ironically, not to mind her when they were alone. His pipe, she noted, a little curiously, was like a companion to him and absorbed a little of that too close attention which he had been inclined to expend upon herself; the vile smelling pipe was like a third, who spared her the embarrassment of an unwelcome *tête-à-tête*. She was grateful to it, and more tolerant of her husband the more he left her to herself.

There was a scheme on foot that summer for horse-racing at Chinsurah; Mr. Van Cott threw himself into it very heartily. Three times a week the course must be rolled and set in good order; he took a fancy to supervise this work himself. The racing began the first week in June and provided very tolerable sport. Chinsurah had never seen so lively a company; General St. Leger was there, and Colonel Arthur Wellesley, John

Scawen and his friend William Hickey, and the former's nephew, a young clergyman named Blunt, very eccentric and odd in his manners.

After the racing Mrs. Van Cott saw no more of them, but left them to their turtle and fat deer, their champagne, hock and claret, and their headaches of next morning. Sitting solitary at her bedroom window, with the sleeping child in the room behind her, she listened to St. Leger very spiritedly singing 'The British Grenadiers' and thought wistfully of home. The men could find plenty to amuse them at any spot on earth it appeared, but her chief pleasure lay in letters from England, and the disappointment was bitter when these failed to come. It was odd, considering that in all the world there was no one whom she loved or who loved her, except the sleeping child at her side, how passionately she longed for England, for her home, which had never been more than a roof to cover her head, and the members of her family, who had had no desire in connection with her except to be rid of her; not one of them had shown affection or a wish for one hour of her company for its own sake, yet she longed for them, for in her breast, unknown to herself, unsuspected by others, was locked a capacity for love almost frightening in its intensity; it was André's, and she thought it had died with him, but, at eighteen, a girl's heart does not die; it is wounded and sleeps into recovery. Who was there in the world on whom to lavish love but Caroline? She turned her face with sullen obstinacy away from her husband; she *would* not like him.

Her mother, rather surprisingly, was an excellent correspondent; if her letters lacked tenderness, they contained much lively gossip of the world which Charlotte had never cared for but to which, in exile, she felt herself indissolubly linked, the little trivial world of fashion, of cards and love affairs and scandal, of births and deaths and matches, the latest modes and the last squib upon the Court. So far from home, news took on a more vital meaning, and a deeper value.

LORD MORNINGTON ARRIVES AT CALCUTTA 1798

The *Albion* which arrived in September, after a sensational voyage of no more than three months and four days, brought the disagreeable news¹ of the Emperor of Germany's having made a separate peace with the Corsican usurper, Buonaparte, who was going up in the world, and — news more distressing to loyal Britons — of the alarming mutiny of the seamen, which spread consternation throughout Asia. What would the world come to if the British Navy did not keep faith?

Charlotte felt a more personal grief at the news, brought by a later ship and which more nearly concerned her, that Mr. Edmund Burke was dead. His son Richard had been her playmate, the great Mr. Burke himself had shown the lonely child some kindness. And she felt gratitude to him for a later, wider, benevolence to which she had contributed secret funds, that orphanage, the Penn Seminary, which he had founded for the children of those who had died upon that ill-contrived and worse-conducted expedition to Brittany which had desolated her own life.

Mrs. Van Cott lived very much alone, but not enough to arouse disagreeable comment. Her retirement at Chinsurah, for her health's sake as she protested, saved her much of the social intercourse which she disliked, but she had acquaintances among the ladies of the Calcutta Settlement with whom she lived on very civil terms, more particularly with Lady Anstruther, a very capricious woman, sometimes insolent and extremely haughty, at others affable and pleasing. They travelled to Chinsurah and occasionally she visited them in town. She found such social exchanges tiresome and insipid.

The whole life of Calcutta changed, however, upon the arrival of Lord Mornington, who burst forth like a constellation with all his pomp and splendour. Mr. Van Cott took a fine lodging in Calcutta, and persuaded a reluctant Charlotte to occupy it during the fêtes in honour of Nelson's glorious victory of the Nile.. After they were over Mrs. Van Cott would have

¹ The 'news' turned out to be only a rumour.

returned to Chinsurah, but Sir Henry Russell's lady arriving not long after, accompanied by two charming nieces, lovely Rose Aylmer and Mary Lloyd, Charlotte was offered generously what she had always sadly lacked, female companionship of a congenial kind. She threw herself into friendship with an ardour which amused her husband and enraged Lady Anstruther, who had sought a closer intimacy in vain. Calcutta was prodigiously diverted by the antics of a jealous woman; for friendship with Lady Russell meant the closing in one's face of Lady Anstruther's door. Society survived it, as it does these arrogant caprices, but those shut out regretted her ladyship's incomparable cook. Indeed, some of the wags, who had remarked upon Sir Henry Russell's execrable dinners and superb claret, and Sir John Anstruther's very inferior wines, suggested either that Sir Henry should suborn Sir John's cook, or Sir John kidnap Sir Henry's wine merchant; they sang a mournful ditty at the table of Mr. Van Cott, where one was sure of finding both good wines and good dinners:

To dine with the Judges is no great recreation,
The one gives you poison, the other starvation.

Since it was not possible to keep out of the feud, Mr. Van Cott was glad that Fortune, and his wife, had ranged him on the side of Lady Russell, for he could endure poor cooking, but would certainly not have survived bad wines.

Lord Mornington's sumptuous entertainments, which added so much to the gaiety of Calcutta, covered a good deal of unrest. There was trouble in Benares, and, there being undoubted signs of Tipoo Sultan's hostile intentions towards the British, a fine army took the field and marched against Seringapatam, which fell with dreadful slaughter. Charlotte's friend, Colonel Arthur Wellesley, seemed, as she laughingly told him, to be going up in the world, as his brother Mornington received much praise for his conduct of this very creditable affair, and soon after was made a Marquis. Arthur Wellesley put on no airs,

but the Marquis Wellesley was no way sparing of the Company's money. His establishment was extravagant in the superlative degree, his splendour quite regal.

This was quite exciting for Calcutta, which must be developed in a style to suit his grandiose notions. The city was vastly improved by a new road, sixty feet wide, which was carried right round it until it met the river, which afforded a very pleasant exercise ground for the Europeans, and was much appreciated by Mrs. Van Cott, driving her husband's wonderful Arabians with great dash and style.

The Marquis then set about planning one palace in Calcutta, which would do justice to himself and to his country, and another at Barackpore to serve as a country residence. He had a score of such wonderful schemes in his head, and would have multiplied them had not the Company grown alarmed for its coffers. Calcutta society was never at a loss for a subject of conversation; the Marquis Wellesley was an inexhaustible fount, though there was little said of his brother Arthur. The Marquis gave a most splendid entertainment to the whole Settlement when the news of the long expected Peace arrived at last in 1802.

Mrs. Van Cott took her little daughter into Calcutta for the celebrations. Caroline was as handsome as ever, but growing listless and pale; trips up the river and down the coast for the sea air seemed to benefit her little; the climate did not seem to suit the child. Charlotte was alarmed for her health, and, for the first time, began to talk of home. Mr. Van Cott grew as anxious about his child as her mother seemed to be.

The autumn of this year was uncommonly sickly in Calcutta; Mr. Van Cott lost many of his friends, and most of the others attributed their well-being only to their deep potations. Charlotte was abstemious, and the little Caroline rejected claret; Mr. Van Cott trembled for his wife and child, thus unprotected by good wine. After deep ruminations he set about winding up his affairs. He was a rich man, indeed a very rich man, and in

CHARLOTTE 1774 - 1814

England he need not lose all touch with affairs. He took passage for himself and his family in the Company's ship *Lord Nelson*, and, after a rather maudlin farewell to India, was washed away on seas of claret in the spring of 1803.

The Peace had been short-lived, of course, but it was a very pleasant voyage, quite free from war's alarms; Charlotte had the company of her friend, Miss Mary Lloyd; Captain Spottiswood was extremely agreeable. Caroline revived as soon as she felt the wind from the open sea and was very lively and amusing and a great favourite on board. They made a very good passage to the English Channel, and then fell in with a French privateer. This was one of the tales which Caroline always told the next generation, which knew nothing of the war, with a very lively air. There was a pitched battle, and a gallant resistance; the captain was slain, and many others, the decks ran red with blood, and Miss Lloyd conducted herself like a perfect heroine. All in vain. The *Lord Nelson* fell into the hands of the French, and was steered as a prize towards the nearest port of France, but, very fortunately, fell in with a British vessel of war, was retaken, and conducted safely back to England. A vastly exciting adventure for a little girl.

CHAPTER III

CHARLOTTE, after nearly ten years of exile, was once more at home. Her sweetest memories had been of orchards, and green lawns, and the immemorial peace of England, eternally the same. Her sun-tired eyes had been turned towards sweet smelling gardens, her expectation had looked towards things quite unchanged. The reality was but one more lost illusion. She had grown up in the trim world of the eighteenth century, the elegant world of elaborate courtesies and simple common sense, of charming formal gardens on which, in memory, bright skies eternally looked down, shining softly on marble statues at the end of long green vistas and flickering over exquisite shifting groups of gentlemen and ladies in picturesque, enchanting clothes, who had, as their right, laughter and glittering spears of wit, beauty and leisure, plenty and peace; if there had been ugliness she had forgotten it; if there had been stones in the road, she had not noticed; in her memory their little world had revolved quite smoothly round them.

The French Revolution had been startling, but only as an echo, not as an earthquake in their midst; it had occupied their attention for a moment, but had not altered one habit of their world — only her own, because her heart had been romantic, and had trembled with a genuine, not modish, emotion under the gaze of a pair of sad dark eyes. If one's own heart did not betray one, nothing unpleasant need intrude from a crude and remote world outside the gates of this pleasaunce.

There was, of course, a vague and distant murmur which sometimes rose a trifle alarmingly as if it might hold a menace, but on the whole the crowd outside the gates of privilege seemed content to watch through the bars the gay and pretty shifting scene upon the smooth green lawns, the sunlight flicker-

ing on enchanting silks and little high-heeled shoes with sparkling buckles. Did it ever rain? She had forgotten; in her memory it was always bright, a charming and delightful world which would, apparently, last for ever. Why not? What could destroy it?

Mrs. Van Cott, sailing away to India in the first years of the Terror, had neither seen nor heard nor contemplated any change in the gay and lively scene. She returned unwarned, and, longing passionately for the sheltered gardens and deep greenness of the parks, for the tinkle of light laughter and the elegant music of the minuet, found a world a little disjointed and bewildered, with its park gates open, with the roll of the drums and the march of soldiers instead of the sweetness of fiddles and the grace of the minuet. France had destroyed England's serenity; the rhythm of Europe's dance had altered, and England was reluctantly engaged in a measure less delightful than the dances of her youth. The scene, in fact, was quite transformed.

England, even privileged England, was graver than she had been ten years before, but not, of course, too grave. A few of the less volatile talked less about their pleasures and more about the war. Boney was a boggy to frighten naughty children, but even the lightest hearted shivered at times.

'There are boats at Boulogne,' they whispered, 'fitted out for the attempt. Buonaparte has said the Channel is but a ditch and anyone can cross it who has but the courage to try.'

There were times when England held her breath as Europe did. Would he try? And, if he tried, succeed?

Charlotte, absent so long, detached by temperament, reviewed her elders and her own generation very clearly in the first years after her return. There were giants in England, no doubt of it, a generation of colossal exaggeration was just coming to an end, exaggeration in talent and folly, in ability and vice; men and women who sinned with a sophistry quite superb in its insolence, yet cloaked by an exquisite discretion

as to how and when and where. Mr. Fox and Mr. Pitt were demi-gods in public life, and, if there have been greater men, there have been none who so indisputably bestrode their age; their brilliance and their failings alike left men gaping and striving to keep pace. Was there ever a man who could hold an audience like Sheridan, either in Westminster Hall or at the Duchess's supper table? If so, Fame has not handed down his name. There were still magnificent prizes to be grasped in public life, though prerogative, perhaps, had suffered a little clipping of wings; and men still lost or gained a fortune at the gaming table on the fall of a card or the click of the dice, though a growing number looked askance at it. They still sat drinking until daylight, and then rose with iron will and set about the country's business, very competently, as though they were newly risen, refreshed, from their beds, and swayed an assembly, very critical in its judgments, with their eloquence and wit, though there was a growing volume of queries as to the ill effects of too much mulled port; times were changing, but not yet changed. Politics still offered the great prizes in public life, but if the House was a bore one might set up for a dandy and astonish the Town: Mr. Brummell, who had swum into the first place during Charlotte's absence, was unique; he would, one might safely wager, grow into a legend.

The great figures dominated the world as they had dominated it when she first perceived it; in what, then, lay the change? She found it in the open gates of once private places, and in the crowds pressing, still orderly and good-humoured, but thrusting forward into the pleasaunces from which they had been shut out. The mob was everywhere, and more vocal than it had been when she went away, not growling round a Bastille yet, but clamouring for a share in the things which had, hitherto, been considered out of reach.

At the theatres, for instance. If the play were one's passion, there was the Young Roscius, who appeared at Covent Garden in the part of Selim in *Barbarossa* and took the town by storm;

his popularity was so astonishing that the military had to be called out to preserve order on the nights on which he was to perform, so that the privileged had no more enjoyment of it than the mob that stormed the doors. The menace of thrusting crowds was like thunder, vaguely alarming, wholly distasteful, to a world which had amused itself in inviolate seclusion.

Mr. Van Cott regarded this world with some astonishment and a little discomfort. His wife had carried him to its threshold, and talked, a little disdainfully, of it when she talked to him at all. He could make nothing of her, and, from previous experience, was distrustful. She, who had always been quite abnormally silent, sometimes, now, set aside previous engagements to entertain him with the latest news. It seemed as if she were making an effort to draw him into the life she wished to lead; if so, it was not a great success, for he had suffered so many rebuffs that she found him unresponsive or satirical, and lack of use made her conversation with him disjointed and embarrassed. It was:

'The Young Roscius appeared to-night. He is not equal to his reputation.'

No reply.

She tried again: 'On Saturday I heard Sydney Smith lecture upon "The Conduct of the Human Understanding." His voice is fine, and he is well satisfied with himself. I cannot say we were much wiser, but we were well amused.'

Mr. Van Cott, knowing nothing of these matters, made no comment. His wife tried once more: 'Lady Clifford is to be governess to the Princess Charlotte, and Mrs. and Miss Trimmer the acting ones. Mrs. Trimmer, of course, was a great favourite of Dr. Johnson, as you may have heard.'

Mr. Van Cott cleared his throat. 'No doubt. No doubt.'

Charlotte persevered: 'The Opera is thin of company, thin of performers, thin of lights, thin of figurantes, thin of scene-shifters, thin of everything. I cannot describe the intolerable stupidity of this great town.'

Ho! Ho! Was that it? What did she want? She was yawning. Surely she was not asking for a honeymoon solitude in the country with him? If he were sure . . . She went on hurriedly as he turned on her that look she dreaded, which asked for something that she would not give:

'I attended the Drawing Room on Thursday and so disagreeable a crowd I never was in. The women were hideous, though Miss Drummond looked very well, and Miss Gayner quite pretty; the great Hoop suits her figure.'

Mr. Van Cott, quite bewildered, was silent. Charlotte fidgeted.

'I was sorry for the fate of the Slave Trade Bill last night,' she said in a conciliatory tone.

Mr. Van Cott had given the puzzle up; he could make nothing of her manner. He turned a page of his book. Charlotte's eyes sparkled; if she could not conciliate she would annoy.

'My brother mentioned that in a lecture it had been proved that the Blacks were a species between men and monkeys.'

Mr. Van Cott raised his eyebrows; not so easily could he be ruffled, though, as she knew very well, he felt very deeply on the subject of slaves.

'It might be asserted but could certainly not be proved,' he said mildly. 'It is a doctrine I do not like as it goes directly to justify using them as beasts of burden, an argument which would suit a slave dealer very well.'

He returned to his book, but Charlotte's nervousness would not allow her to be still.

'Have you heard of the elopement in the house of Petre? Maria Juliana escaped with her brother's tutor, a very low man, quite another class, who never associated in the least with the family, a sort of upper servant who dined with the children. Lady Petre had seen her daughter at midnight and only missed her at breakfast. All her clothes were gone. They have been married by a Catholic priest, it is said.'

'What misery an idle girl can cause her parents,' said her husband drily.

Charlotte flushed. What had he heard? Something, of a certainty, to cause this odd, dry mood. She fell silent and left him to his book. As the spring advanced her restlessness increased. Why had she dealt in folly? This world she had sighed for was as hollow as a drum. To leave less leisure for thought she continued to go out almost every night, but that was only one degree better than dozing at home, and sometimes two degrees worse. The essence of an Assembly, she thought cynically, was the not having room to stir; if there were plenty of room the entertainment must be reckoned a failure.

'If you have no time for conversation you fancy everyone is agreeable, and how amusing the conversation might have been,' she glanced maliciously at her taciturn husband.

If only she had some occupation! The Royal Institution, she heard, was more the *ton* than anything, and ladies of all ages submitted to a squeeze of a hundred people in a morning to hear lectures on the Human Understanding, Experimental Philosophy, Painting, Music or Geology. She tried them, and was sometimes amused, but not at all impressed. 'Blue-ness,' she thought, 'is not at all becoming. Most of the ladies are, to be charitable, not very handsome, and to see them listening with profound attention to the opinions of Descartes and Newton, some taking notes and all looking as wise as owls in daylight, is really quite ridiculous.' Mr. Davy, who lectured on Geology or the Chemical History of the Earth, was certainly very interesting and clever, but the owls looked no brighter than they did at other times. She would go to no more lectures.

She flung herself on her daybed with Miss Edgeworth's new tale *The Modern Griselda* which set her mouth in a wry smile. Griselda's was certainly not her role, yet she was out of tune with the world of *ton*. How to kill time was a great problem. She would have been glad of her husband's company,

if only to jibe at him, but Mr. Van Cott was unavailable, away on one of those long, mysterious absences which were growing more frequent and about which, unacknowledged, her curiosity was extreme. She sent for one of her beaux, young Harry Charteris, to attend her to the Opera. Mr. Charteris was always so obliging and amusing; for her entertainment he collected all the *bon mots* of the town. Seeing her out of spirits he endeavoured to divert her with a selection of them.

'I met Lord Petersham in St. James's, this morning. He had a new snuff box "only suitable for June", he said. Alvanley smoked him and thought it rather resembled Jerusalem than Olympus. "Your mind runs too much on Jews, Alvanley," Petersham said. "It must," he answered mournfully. "Is there any chance, do you think, of the ten tribes of Israel being recovered? I have exhausted the other two".'

Charlotte laughed, a little languidly. Generally Lord Alvanley's wit enchanted her, but to-day everything fell flat.

There was an unusual atmosphere of excitement at the Opera. Charlotte, sensitive to such things, perceived it at once. Fop's Alley was as crowded as usual, the dandies as elegant, but the fingers which held the gold handled spy glasses with which they raked the boxes or the stage seemed to fumble a little. The dandies were nervous, and, at the first hint of the coming storm, they scattered from their beloved promenade like chaff in a gale. There was trouble in the theatre, undoubtedly; the Londoners were angry about something and growled like wild beasts.

'There will be a riot. I know there will be a riot,' said Mr. Charteris nervously.

'That will be diverting. I have never seen one,' answered Mrs. Van Cott languidly, unfurling her fan. 'What is the trouble?'

'The Bishop of London has been monstrous officious and told Kelly that the show must finish before midnight. Poor

Kelly has orders to drop the curtain even if the ballet is only half done.'

'La! La! Why will Bishops put their fingers in such pies?'

It was Saturday, the fashionable night, of course, and so doubly inconvenient. The audience was restive throughout the performance, the air heavy with signs of coming storm, but nothing serious happened until the curtain fell while Deshayes and Parisot were dancing a *pas de deux*. Then the uproar began.

'Raise the curtain. Raise the curtain. Finish the ballet,' was shouted from all parts of the house. There were hisses, shouts and yells in which the ladies of quality took their share. Mrs. Van Cott was vastly diverted at the new sensation and shouted with the rest. Poor Kelly was distracted, and, from the stage, confessed the Bishop's sin.

'You know, Kelly, you are telling a lie,' came a voice from the third row of boxes.

The uproar redoubled. The rioters threw all the chairs out of the boxes, tore up the benches in the pit, broke the chandeliers and smashed the instruments of the unfortunate musicians, and, finally, poured out of the theatre with shouts of joy before the soldiers came.

Breathless and laughing Charlotte and her escort made their way out through the ruins and the dark.

'A vastly diverting evening, Harry, I have not laughed so much for an age.'

She was laughing still, but she held her hand to her side; a flying missile had struck her, and she winced with pain. Her coach was gone, seeking safety from the tumult; leaning on Mr. Charteris's arm she walked with some difficulty to his lodging, which, fortunately, *he* said, was near.

Mrs. Van Cott was not much hurt, it appeared, but it was some time before Mr. Charteris sent for a coach, and she reached home at an hour late enough to have alarmed her household, which had heard of the rioting. Her maid, in

particular, was much concerned at the accident, and was with difficulty restrained from sending for the physician.

'It is nothing, nothing,' her mistress persisted with some irritation.

No harm done? Perhaps not. But one riot was enough; Charlotte was bored with the Opera and thought she would patronize instead the young Roscius, who, they said, received a hundred guineas a night. This, at least, was remarkable, for Mrs. Siddons, who set no small value on herself, was content with half of that. Mr. Charteris, who, being newly from Italy, fancied himself in the part of a *ciscebeo*, was always ready to escort Mrs. Van Cott, and had many tales of the infant prodigy with which to beguile her wandering attention.

'The House adjourned in a body to see his Hamlet,' he related.

'He and Buonaparte seem now to divide the world,' said Charlotte drily. Mr. Van Cott regarded his wife's young friend quizzically, was civil enough, and spent more time than ever out of town. His wife went her separate way. It is an easy passage in matrimony from hostility to indifference, and they appeared to have reached a working compromise which answered well enough, though, she thought, he still cherished some illusions. She had returned to that brilliant Devonshire House circle which revolved round Charles Fox and the beautiful Duchess. The greatest of their glories were over, their splendid extravagances and preposterous follies were undoubtedly diminishing, though most of their charm remained. It was mainly a question of age, of course; the leaders were ageing and growing more sedate; only Sheridan retained his sparkling quality of mind, and *his* physical deterioration was even more marked than that of the others. They were all struggling with the encroachments of wrinkles, with fat, and various ailments, and the galloping middle years. The Duchess herself was often in pain, and lived in terror of blindness, and some of her panic sometimes spread to her friends. It was not

as it had been, but it was still the most brilliant circle in the world, the last, astonishing brightness of the eighteenth century before the candles flickered and went out.

Charlotte, though her youth was a reproach, was welcome there, a great deal for her mother's sake, a little for her own. Mr. Van Cott hardly knew the members of the coterie, though, as a matter of form, he had been graciously received at Devonshire House. His wife saw less and less of him, and was too armoured in her pride to own that his desertion hurt her, and that she was curious as to his pursuits - a country girl, she supposed scornfully, who would supply that sentimental twaddle for which he yearned.

There was no woman, at least none of any lasting interest, to feed the poor man's dreams; he was building, rather pathetically, intent on supervising the improvements which he was making at the country house which he had bought, complete with portraits of ancestors, in his native county of Lincolnshire, not far from the small estate on which he had been born, and which he had recently extracted from the grasp of the money-lenders into which his father and brother and nephew had pressed it. He was generous with grace, but he could not resist the temptation to become Lord of the Manor where once he had been humbled as a penniless younger son. When he was not building, there were shooting, fox hunting and racing to be attended to, not very enthusiastically it is true, but as a duty, as became a gentleman.

When he met his wife he wore an expression of polite irony which vexed her because it did not completely hide his wistful regrets. If he were ironical with her he was proud of her, too, as she knew very well, for she shone quite brightly in that cluster of stars which glittered round Duchess Georgiana, and yet retained some subtle difference which set her apart. The long years in a hot climate, in a society which she despised, had induced her to defy fashions; her defiance persisted without arousing either ridicule or protest. Her face, both

sweet and beautiful in repose, though it sometimes wore an expression of ironical disdain which marred it, remained calm in a company which gushed and simpered; she was tranquil where vivacity was the rule, and her capacity for detachment amid a network of intrigues and jealousies gave her a good deal of power.

Mr. Van Cott relied too much, perhaps, on that detachment. When, in due course, after the fashion of the set, she took a lover, more or less openly, it occasioned some surprise, the more so because she chose a mild, middle-aged little country gentleman, not at all unlike Mr. Van Cott. If she liked the type, why not be content with her husband? The inquirers forgot that her husband had bought her, while her lover had not.

Her rumoured capitulation brought other moths to singe their wings at the flame of her cold beauty, which burnt others like a fire. Among them came the Prince. He had grown fatter and coarser since the unfinished episode of her girlhood, but his hearty kiss on either cheek and delighted 'My pretty Charlotte,' in some curious way poured balm into the wounds her marriage had dealt her pride. George was still a fine figure of a man with charming manners, when he cared to produce them, and a boisterous good humour which offended her taste much less than it once had done. His attentions gratified her, and she was seen a great deal that year in his company; but perhaps that might be explained — Mr. Van Cott hoped so — by the fact that her little daughter was a good deal with Princess Charlotte at Carlton House.

Mrs. Van Cott had found her daughter something of a problem; she was not altogether happy at seeing as little of her as fashion ordained, especially after the constant companionship which had been their delight in India. It was different in England; her world had very definite and firm ideas about children; it was considered that until they were broken in to the usages of society they should play no part in it, be neither seen nor heard. The Devonshire House children were no

exceptions to this rule; the Duchess's brats, as she called them, were all plain, and she found them uninteresting and very little worth the expenditure of time snatched from the whirl of her social engagements; she was fond of them, in her way, but it was a very casual way, and a way which set the fashion for her intimates, since she could hardly be expected to tolerate other children when she had no time for her own. Besides, the rule was not only for practice but was good in theory; children should not be produced for the inspection and admiration of assembled guests as was sometimes the way in other eras; they were all agreed on that point, when they spared a fleeting thought for the duties of parenthood; the brats were not, indeed, considered important enough to supply small talk for the dullest company; they roused far less interest than a modish lady's modish little dog. Their mothers, having, absent-mindedly, produced them with the aid of some father or other, forgot them for long periods; somehow or other, generally from servants, they picked up some education and the elements of good behaviour, and, in time, someone awoke to the necessity for providing a governess or a tutor, and even for considering the advisability of school.

Mr. Van Cott, not being of the *haut ton*, disliked this casualness, and Mrs. Van Cott, as was her way, did not wholly conform to a fashion which failed to meet with her approval. She observed that the system worked very well with the Duchess's own children, and with the young Lambs, who were docile, but that it was fatal with a girl like Caroline Ponsonby, and might prove so with any but the quietest of children.

Caroline van Cott was quite exceptionally cared for, in that her father took an interest in her, and that her mother inspected governesses and schools for herself and did not take them on trust.

Charlotte was a most devoted mother, but that did not mean that she gave her daughter a great deal of her time, merely that she exercised some discretion in the selection and super-

vision of instructors and companions, and that mother and child met with pleasure and some intimacy. It was with some reluctance that she consented to her daughter's visits to the Princess Charlotte, and only after a good deal of warm persuasion on the part of the Prince. The two girls were much of an age, but the young Princess was a hoyden, whereas Caroline was very dainty and demure. Princess Charlotte wanted her companions to play leap-frog, while Caroline hated to have her clothes torn and her hair ruffled. A passion for riding was the chief bond between the children; Princess Charlotte was positively buckish about horses and the demure Caroline shared her feeling for them; with scared and anxious grooms at their heels they galloped about the country, and Caroline's hot climate fragility speedily yielded to crisp English winds. The companionship could not, however, be a constant one, for Mr. Van Cott had very firmly determined that his daughter should go to school as soon as her health was sufficiently established; companions of her own age and teachers with high principles would be better for her, he considered, than lackeys and lap-dogs and a precocious acquaintance with the habits of fine ladies, and it was not a point on which his wife cared to oppose him. In the meantime her visits to Carlton House, with her mother, might be continued.

Carlton House was very hospitable, and often contained quite respectable company, though it had the reputation, justly or unjustly, of being little better than an Abode of Love. The Princess of Wales did not live there, but *that* – the Prince's friends were compelled to reassure themselves – was entirely her own fault; she simply *would* not behave properly. The Prince had his failings, of course, but he was very good company, *if* one did not quarrel with him, as one all too frequently seemed to do. It was often amusing at Carlton House, and the Pavilion at Brighton, that strange concoction of sugared cupolas, was even more hospitable than Carlton House.

The Van Cott's went to Brighton in the summer of 1805, and Mr. Van Cott's lady followed much the same social round as she did in town, but Mr. Van Cott, watching his wife with worried speculation, noticed some changes in her habits; she did not dance, for instance, which seemed to him remarkable, since dancing had remained her chief delight. She explained, a trifle curtly, that that injury at the Opera House had been more serious than at first appeared, but it was nothing, nothing, and had left no more than a temporary stiffness which would soon pass and leave her as eager as ever to dance.

He did not believe her, as she was very well aware, but, for the moment, she would give him no further satisfaction; he might think what he pleased.

In August he went back to his building in Lincolnshire, and, for the first time, he failed to observe the forms of courtesy with her; he sent none of those formal, polite letters, which she was generally too impatient or too scornful to read. She missed them, and spared a fleeting thought for him; there was a faint compassion in it, but it was chiefly concerned with anxiety about herself. With a man of breeding one could prophesy safely, but what was *he* going to do?

At first the thought of the coming baby vexed her; being with child inconvenienced her, and interfered with entertaining and being entertained, the physical discomfort irked her, and she felt some alarm about her health. That was over, however, when she returned to Town in September; her only anxiety, then, was lest Mr. Van Cott should show his lack of breeding by refusing to accept the situation, and by taking some active step to end it.

She had heard no word from him when, in November, she lay in the great four-poster in her bedroom in Berkeley Square and her second daughter was put into her arms. She surprised the nurse by begging to be allowed to keep the child with her, and lay for a long time pensively watching the infant. It was a grey day with occasional flickers of watery sunshine and there

seemed a great deal of commotion in the streets. Her mother came in towards dusk in a state of unusual excitement.

'There has been a great victory off Spain, Trafalgar, and Nelson, they say, is dead.'

Lady O'Deane had a good deal to say on the subject; it was rumoured that all the admirals were dead. Pitt would be jubilant; the victory would dash the Whig hopes once more – and Buonaparte's; there would be no more talk of invasion of England after this, and she, for one, would sleep more soundly at nights, and that was the end of that upstart hussy, Emma Hamilton, and her flaunting vulgarity.

'And how is the baby? What a pity it is another girl.'

Lady O'Deane rustled away for a fresh orgy of gossip over the card table, and a little later, behind a footman bearing the tall candles, came Mr. Van Cott.

He was still in riding-dress and carried a whip in his hand, which, to her disturbed fancy, seemed to make him more formidable than he had ever appeared to her before. He stood silently by the bedside looking down at his wife with an enigmatic stare. She returned his look steadily.

He threw his whip upon a chair.

'Well, madam,' he said, at length, drily. 'I am told that you have presented me with a new daughter.'

Charlotte relaxed among her pillows. In the flickering candlelight he could not see that her forehead was beaded with moisture. He had decided to accept the child; in her heart she had always supposed that he would but there had been moments of doubt.

'A fine little girl,' she said faintly

'Whom does she take after?'

So it was not to be so easy. An apparently harmless question, yet in reality a challenge which she must take up or ignore. She took it up without hesitation.

'I think she is distinctly a Van Cott.'

Her husband smiled, a little crookedly. He bent over her

CHARLOTTE 1774 - 1814

white, blue veined hand, which looked, he thought, disarmingly fragile.

'The physician tells me he is not satisfied with you. Take care of yourself, my dear.'

He picked up the whip, crossed the room without looking back, and closed the door quietly behind him.

Charlotte lay very still among her pillows.

CHAPTER IV

MRS. VAN COTT called her daughter Georgiana after the beautiful Duchess, who called to gossip with her as she nursed her infant; for upon this, in spite of its eccentricity, she insisted; no child of hers should be put out to nurse. The ladies of her acquaintance found this so diverting that they all came to watch.

'My dear love,' said the Duchess gushingly, 'how that gown becomes you; you should be seen more in the world, indeed you should.'

'I have another world - here,' laughed Charlotte. The ladies stared.

'La! All babies are so much alike, though I'll own that is a sweet one. Have you heard Sherry's latest tale? The Marquis came so late to his ball that everyone inquired the reason: "I have been waiting for my tailor," said he, "to sew the buttons on my inexpressibles." "Could he not have done that before?" asked Sherry. "By no means," the Marquis answered coolly. "Each of these buttons contains the picture of a beauty and I have the tailor in while my hair is dressed to tell him which to place nearest my heart." 'Pon my honour, my dear love, he changes his pictures for the latest raging belles.'

The ladies laughed slyly. 'Have you heard the latest of Sherry's tales about the Chancellor?' another chimed in. 'You must know, my dear, that at the ball the Dancing Chancellor¹ danced with Miss Drummond after having dined and wine too long at a party with the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and a Greater Personage than these. They were all mighty merry and set Somerset House on fire *twice*, and, after dancing, the Lord High Chancellor

¹ This was Lord Erskine.

of England set out to row upon the Thames. Chancellor Ego is coming out in a new role.'

'So much for the rulers of this land,' said Charlotte scornfully.

Her friends stared at her in great surprise. It must be her health.

Mrs. Crewe rustled in with a great deal of twitter and tinkle, full of pretty phrases for her dearest Charlotte and of curiosity, which, they were all soon aware, was not to be satisfied. They shrugged their shoulders; Charlotte *was* odd.

'Was Sherry at Mrs. Fox's ball?' Mrs. Crewe asked.

'No, I think not. He was at a levee at St. James's which was so crowded that they called it the *levée en masse*.'

'I am curious about Mrs. Fox's ball,' confessed Mrs. Crewe. 'Mr. Lyttleton said there was all the world but little of his wife.'

'Charles himself when asked what it was like referred inquirers to the First Book of Samuel, 22nd chapter, 2nd verse.'

'Where is a Bible, Charlotte? Who would have thought to look there for a description of Mrs. Fox's ball.'

Charlotte stretched out a languid hand to the bookshelves and slowly turned the pages:

'And everyone that was in distress and everyone that was in debt, and everyone that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him and he became a captain over them?'

'How like Charles!'

In a splutter of laughter the ladies prepared to depart.

It was the last time Charlotte saw the beautiful Duchess. Before Georgiana took her first uncertain steps the greatest figures of her mother's world had been swept away like the pieces from a chess board; Mr. Pitt, the Duchess of Devonshire, Mr. Fox, were all gone before the Christmas of 1806, and with them seemed to have passed the Charlotte who had fought so obstinately against her fate.

Mr. Van Cott, watching his wife curiously when he brought

in the news of the Duchess's death was fully aware, for the first time, of the change in her. She had, in a few months, dropped out of the modish world, and she had done so of set purpose; he was to be rewarded for his good behaviour by a companionable and docile wife; she was, at last, allowing the ice about her heart to thaw, and the affection for him which she had always felt, was to have its way at last; but he must, he knew, walk warily.

Charlotte did not, as he had expected, grieve very deeply for the Duchess; she had loved her, as all her world did, but that haunting fear of blindness had hag-ridden all her later days and set her a little apart from friendship. Charlotte, in fact, was more grieved for the loss of Mr. Pitt, with whom she had had only a very slight acquaintance.

Removed from the modish world she had discovered a new perspective – wholly unselfish. The death of Pitt was something which defied the understanding; he was an institution rather than a man. How was England to survive it? It was impossible to think of the country's affairs being carried on without that slim, red-faced man to guide them. Who would, who *could*, beat the French but he? Who could lead the Tories? Who was to advise the King? She was dismayed, and startled to discover how clearly it appeared, now he was gone, that Pitt *was* England; his stubborn courage in the face of continual disaster and disappointment had upheld England through all the dreadful years, and that alone. In all Europe Pitt had been the only man whom Boney feared. Pitt had, patiently, rebuilding from ruined plans again and again, planned victory, and now the war, in spite of Austerlitz, seemed to have taken a turn for the better, at least Trafalgar had shown that England could hold her own at sea. And the man who had planned victory, who alone had made victory possible in the days of defeat, had died before it was in sight. It was the bitterest of fates, and the more generous of his opponents felt consternation. Pitt was *England*, not just the

Tory leader. And he had died a bankrupt, when he might have, when almost all his rivals *would* have, dipped hands in the treasury to draw out a private fortune. There was a magnificent nobility about his failures which awed his foes.

Mr. Van Cott had always been a Pittite; now he found his wife on the same side.

Charlotte's world was destroyed, but the greater change was in her, so great a change that she watched with astonishment and a feeling of shock the world of *ton*, which did not interrupt its gaieties for either Trafalgar or Austerlitz, but danced on the night of Nelson's funeral and as Mr. Pitt lay dead, as it had danced when French heads fell under the guillotine and her own heart had been broken by a futile expedition to Quiberon. She had finished with it, for herself, though she might keep in touch with it for the sake of her children, who must, of course, be properly launched in life. For herself there was a new, a fascinating occupation, that of being a mother and a wife.

She read, to please Mr. Van Cott, his friend, William Wilberforce's, *Views of Christianity*, and found it quite an angelic book, though rather methodistical. She was as pleased as Mr. Van Cott himself when Mr. Wilberforce won his long-drawn-out battle for the abolition of the Slave Trade. Charlotte and her husband were settling into an odd, shy friendship; Mr. Charteris found his nose quite out of joint and was outrageous. Mr. Van Cott escorted his wife to the Opera himself in these days; she needed no *ciscebeo*. The Opera was new done up and beautiful; Catalani was in marvellous voice, and there was a new dancer, a pupil of Parisides, who danced, Charlotte said, divinely. Mr. Van Cott was willing to believe her, and smiled with great benevolence even when Mr. Charteris came sulkily to pay his devoir.

In Mrs. Van Cott's ear the young gentleman murmured his disapproval of this new arrangement.

'La, my dear, you mustn't mind him,' Charlotte said gaily

in a whisper, but a whisper which reached Mr. Van Cott very well. 'You must remember the old definition of a husband: 'It is a thing that sits at the bottom of the table and likes legs better than wings of chicken.'

Mr. Van Cott caught the delicate flicker of an eyelid directed at him and chuckled softly. What an agreeable sensation this was for an elderly gentleman, this sweet understanding with a gay young wife. What happiness it held – of a kind he had never contemplated, and so enjoyed the more. They discussed, as friends and equals, all the manifold affairs which occupied the world, the unhappy fate of the Princess of Wales, and poor dear Princess Charlotte. There was no more bitter critic of the Prince of Wales in England than Mrs. Van Cott, though Caroline still occasionally went to Carlton House and came home with much illuminating prattle.

The Van Cott's spent very little time in London. They went to Ramsgate together in the summer of 1807, and, on the King's Birthday, saw, for the first time, a couple dance the waltz, which Charlotte had heard of and was very curious to see. She was, at first, quite shocked by it, and thought it a most licentious dance, quite unsuitable for persons of breeding.

They went to Bath that winter for Mr. Van Cott's gout, but were in London early in 1808, and at Drury Lane, where they were charmed with Mrs. Jordan in *Three Weeks after Marriage*.

'I admire her so much that I could forgive the Duke of Clarence anything,' cried Charlotte.

She found London dull, however, and a little anxious under the chatter; there was the bombardment of Copenhagen to startle the orthodox, and Mr. Canning's political fireworks, but the chief queries were 'Do you belong to the Argyle?' and 'Have you read *Marmion*?' She read the latter and was enchanted by it; a new literary star appeared to have swum into the firmament, and Mr. Pope's elegant couplets, which had been her standard of perfection, seemed a little monotonous

and flat. She read a good deal nowadays, for her husband was bookish, and she thought she ought to keep abreast of things for his sake and the children's, since they had become the whole of her world.

Charlotte went that winter with Mr. Van Cott to see *Richard Cœur de Lion* and with that gesture, though he did not know it, buried the past and took him into her heart.

O Richard, o mon roi
L'univers t'abandonne.

The song held only a sweet memory, no longer an aching grief.

The world of fashion paused a moment just then to talk about affairs in Spain, but Spain was a long way off and, suddenly, everyone in England was busy making shoes. The craze spread like fire in a timber yard and became an obsession. Shoemakers found themselves courted like monarchs; everybody wanted lessons in the fashionable game; tap, tap, tap, went modish hammers. Princess Charlotte learnt the trade, and fine ladies boasted in ballrooms that they had made the shoes upon their feet; where belles led the way the beaux must follow; fine gentlemen also took to making shoes.

Caroline, of course, was full of the new pastime. Mr. Van Cott, otherwise completely happy, was sometimes a little worried about his daughter; she seemed so extremely volatile, so entirely lacking in respect. This however, appeared to be a special affliction reserved for his generation, since he was by no means the only sufferer. He received just then a letter from an old friend in Calcutta with which he found himself in hearty agreement, though both wife and daughter laughed when he read it aloud:

' . . . I don't know how you may find it, but to me the manner of young people of both sexes are now most unpleasantly and provokingly self-sufficient, no respect whatever for parents, nor for age; and to hear their language one would be led to suppose them exclusively possessed of all the knowledge,

talents and ability human nature is susceptible of acquiring, and much of which you and I have but just attained . . .’

‘What an old fogram,’ said Caroline, with an airy kiss on the top of her father’s head. ‘He should write to the newspapers about it.’

CAROLINE

Mozart: *Nozze di Figaro*



Un moto di gioja mi sento in petto che
annunzia diletto in mezzo il timor;

CHAPTER I

CAROLINE had been sent to a school at Kensington, housed in a huge old brick mansion, which had somehow won a reputation among fathers who lived overseas; Mr. Van Cott had heard it recommended by friends in Calcutta. Caroline felt the cold after India and invested some of her very liberal pocket-money in payments to another small child for crawling under the table during lessons to rub her chilblains. There were stocks and backboards, and in the courtyard at the back there was a ramshackle old yellow chariot which the more advanced pupils were taught to enter and alight from with the proper grace and dignity, in case they should be fortunate enough to marry rich husbands and have carriages of their own.

The young ladies learned other things than deportment – French from an old émigré Marquis, who taught a courtliness of the old world, as well as a perfect accent, and to write in a delicate but firm and legible Italian hand – the writing-master was a very important person. Caroline drew admirably and sang very sweetly; she played the pianoforte with taste, the harp with feeling, and had an admirably thorough knowledge of English literature of the purest kind, Swift, Addison, Pope and the weightiest theologians, and some small, surreptitious acquaintance with the naughtier works of Shakespeare.

When she was nearly ready to make her curtsy to the world she learned to curb her naturally good appetite, since it was whispered in her circle that the wonderful Lord Byron could not bear to see a woman eat; but that was not part of the school curriculum, which would have scorned to recognize the existence of such a naughty knave.

Caroline consulted her mother as to the truth of this rumour. ‘He must have observed Lady Scott,’ Charlotte replied drily.

'At supper last night she had first half a breast of mutton, then half a chicken, then a whole lobster, a blanchmange and a mixed salad.'

At school they talked in whispers of their hero and his fascinations, and discussed the antics of Lady Caroline Lamb. Miss Van Cott knew that wild enchanting lady, and had caught a glimpse of Byron himself, so that she was the envied centre of a group of schoolfellows when she whispered tales of sleepy William Lamb and his gusty Cherubina and of the Oriental twist of the wonderful Lord Byron's mind.

School was very agreeable, but equally agreeable was the leaving it. The world looked very bright to the sunny-tempered Caroline. The shadow over Europe was undoubtedly lifting; the world, having heard something about Moscow, was now dancing to a gayer Spanish air. Caroline's old friend, Colonel Arthur Wellesley, who had tickled her bare toes on the veranda at Chinsurah, was a Marquis now, very splendid, with a blue ribbon to wear across his breast when he came home from Ciudad Rodrigo. Mr. Creevey, an old friend of her father, had some very amusing tales of the new Marquis, 'who,' he said, 'ought to be hanged', which made Miss Caroline laugh. Almost everything made her laugh, including her father's halting and embarrassed efforts at reproof.

She was presented on her seventeenth birthday, and the Regent, who still always distinguished between the pretty debutantes and the plain ones, gave her a smacking kiss on either cheek. He was charming to Charlotte, who presented her daughter. Caroline could make nothing of her mother's enigmatic smile; *she* thought the Prince delightful. Charlotte said: 'He is fatter. You should have seen him twenty years ago.'

Caroline was an instantaneous success, and was toasted as a raging belle. She was lovely, undeniably, but it was her animation rather than her beauty which made her so popular; she had an enormous zest for life, in a rather war-weary world,

and enjoyed everything, from a party at Carlton House, where everyone else was stifling yawns, to an expedition to Vauxhall Gardens, which her father, who liked that somewhat old fashioned entertainment much better than the Prince's galas, arranged for her amusement. Caroline was exceedingly diverted and insisted on seeing everything, the hundred thousand lamps, the fiddlers in cocked hats, who played ravishing melodies under the gilded cockleshell in the centre of the gardens, the Dark Walks where lovers lost themselves, the fireworks which crackled overhead.

Mr. Van Cott liked the singers best, particularly when they warbled sentimental ballads which reminded him of his youth, but Caroline was most enchanted with the dancing, and longed to join in a country-dance with the bouncing boys and girls.

Her mother, who was enjoying herself in her own quiet fashion, pretended to be shocked, and persuaded her instead to watch Madame Saqui mounting to the stars on a slack rope, and a panorama of Muscovy, with savage songs against the Corsican upstart sung by Mrs. Salmon as an accompaniment. Charlotte, in a mood as reminiscent as her husband's, talked of the very first panorama, which had come to London from Edinburgh when she was a girl; she forgot the subject now but it had certainly made a great sensation; how many panoramas had she seen since then? It was certainly an amusement which had come to stay.

Mr. Van Cott was delighted when he spied an old Bengal acquaintance whom he had not seen for years; Jos Sedley, his name was, and he had a very pretty girl under his arm, whom he introduced as Miss Rebecca Sharp. Mr. Van Cott would have liked to join their party, but his wife thought that Mr. Sedley had already had too much rum punch, and that the company was hardly suitable for her daughter - a minx, if ever she saw one, was that Miss Rebecca Sharp.

Mr. Van Cott ordered supper in a box adjoining Mr. Sedley's, and was obliged to confess that his wife was right;

Mr. Sedley was being very noisy, and was obviously in his glory ordering about the waiters with great majesty as he made the salad and uncorked the champagne.

Mr. Van Cott, carving his chicken and serving the slices of almost invisible ham for which Vauxhall was famous, listened wistfully to his acquaintance's high spirits, which reminded him of convivial nights in Calcutta.

'A bowl of rack punch, waiter,' shouted Mr. Sedley.

It was a bowl which was to make history, rob Rebecca of a husband, and lead to all the adventures of 'Vanity Fair', but Mr. Van Cott, of course, could not know that; he only regretted that decorum and his wife's high breeding forbade his party joining that livelier party next door. Jos was certainly uncommonly lively; he talked and laughed so much that he brought scores of listeners round the box, and then volunteered to sing a song, which he did, in that maudlin high key peculiar to gentlemen in his state.

'Brayvo, fat 'un,' said one onlooker.

'Angcore, Daniel Lambert,' cried another.

'What a figure for a tight rope,' exclaimed a wag.

Caroline was extremely diverted by her neighbours; she peeped round under the brim of her bonnet and could hardly contain her laughter, but she was a little sorry for the quiet, blushing little thing who made the fourth of Mr. Sedley's party, and whom her escort addressed soothingly as 'Amelia'.

'For heaven's sake, Jos, let us get up and go,' said that young gentleman whose name appeared to be George.

'Stop, my dearest diddle daddle darling,' shouted Jos, seizing Miss Rebecca round the waist. The two young ladies were pale with alarm and mortification. Mr. Sedley was at last removed.

Mrs. Van Cott drily congratulated her husband on his friends, but Caroline squeezed her father's arm in gratitude for a most diverting evening.

Charlotte, who had lived very happily out of the world of

ton for several years, resumed her place in it with a sigh, and Mr. Van Cott's sympathy; they would so much have preferred to linger in the country, but they were agreed that the child should have a chance to see how she liked the world, and to choose a fashionable husband if she would, though many a country bumpkin, very honest and pleasant, was already sighing at her feet. It was understood that Mr. Van Cott's daughter was an heiress; their box at the Opera was always full of very elegant young men.

'Fuller of men I never saw it,' said Charlotte slyly. Her daughter blushed very prettily, and allowed one of the beaux to wrap her in her shawl. In the crush room Charlotte found herself surrounded by old acquaintances, in a shiver in the draught, her nose delicately wrinkled through the odour of expiring lamps, and her ears beset with the din of footmen bawling for carriages and their owners. She had been sighing for a lost evening of comfort by the fireside with her husband, but it gave her satisfaction to see her Caroline surrounded, while less fortunate young ladies by the dozen were freezing, with shawls off one shoulder, trying to inveigle some man by sweet words or sweeter looks to hand them to their carriages, their unfortunate mammas behind them looking exhausted and despairing, ready to expire with cold, but nobly resigned to any suffering in the battle to snatch from rivals good matches for their girls.

Caroline Van Cott went to all the great houses in which her mother had once been a welcome guest; she was in the magic circle and an heiress to boot, and possessed of a ravishing beauty to drive rivals to despair. The Duchess of Bedford invited her to Woburn, where there was a romping house party with rather strange manners, familiar enough to Charlotte, but quite astonishing to her more carefully brought up daughter. They had the Noah's Ark type of dinner, during which everyone whispered to his next door neighbour, and Caroline felt obliged to do the same, from the dread of hearing her own

voice. But when evening came, such a scene of vulgar noise and riot she had never beheld.

As soon as they left the dining-room the Duchess went to her nursery, and some of the guests went to play at billiards. Lady Asgill established herself in an attitude, lying on a sofa with Sir Thomas Graham at her feet. In the next room there was whist; beyond that Lady Jane and Miss Russell were at a harp and pianoforte, both out of tune, playing 'The Creation'. A few miscellaneous pairs vanished into the long gallery, Caroline among them, hardly knowing what was expected of her, but asking demurely to be shown pictures.

The Duchess came back at last, and, collecting her romping force of girls and boys, they all seized cushions and began to pelt the whist players, who defended themselves by throwing the cards and candles at her head, but the Duchess succeeded in overthrowing the table and a regular battle ensued with cushions, oranges and apples. The romp was at last ended by Lady Jane being nearly blinded by an apple that hit her in the eye. One of the men had been nearly smothered by a female romp getting him on the floor and pommelling him with cushions. To this succeeded Blind Man's Buff.

Caroline enjoyed herself prodigiously, but thought it all extremely odd. She overheard Lady Asgill saying to her mother: 'We have the apartments next to yours. They all communicate, which is extremely comfortable. Sir Thomas Graham's is next to yours, I have the next, and then my sister.'

Charlotte had seen too much of the world to be surprised at anything, but to Caroline, though she enjoyed the romps, this parade was both new and disgusting. She grew used to it, of course, after she had been to many such country-house parties, but they always filled her with a faint distaste.

The winter of 1813-1814 was one long to be remembered in England. Christmas Day was exceptionally beautiful, fine and clear, but the day following, a frost set in and continued without interruption till the month of April. All inland navigation

THE GREAT FROST 1813 - 1814

ceased, and nearly all the song birds perished. The Thames was frozen and a great fair was held upon it, when oxen were roasted. When at last the frost broke the country presented a curious and wonderful sight; enormous masses of ice accumulated and were carried down the river, while vessels which had been moored to the banks were lifted up bodily by the overwhelming force of the torrent, and later left stranded far away in the neighbouring fields. It was a winter which little Georgiana regarded with astonishment, and always remembered as the most wonderful of her life.

Caroline had her first experience of skating, and lost her heart over it. She fell head over ears in love with that elegant performer on the ice, Sir Timothy Grant, of Maudline Hall in Derbyshire, a rake, fifteen years her senior, who was much too handsome for young ladies' peace of mind. He had been a soldier until a ball injured his leg and left him with a faint, beguiling limp, which made his skill on the ice quite celestial; he had a gift, when sober, for amateur diplomacy, and a warm friendship with Prince Metternich which gave him a remarkable value in Ministerial eyes. He was a great match, and had reduced more mothers to despair, and more young ladies to tears, than any other man of fashion.

He was at first amused by the pretty child who so obviously adored him, but he ended by falling very deeply in love himself. Caroline doubted her ability to reform a rake, but she loved him, and Sir Timothy ruined three of his best horses riding nineteen miles at midnight to sigh beneath her window. Such devotion won its reward, after a very short period of probation. Both Mr. and Mrs. Van Cott liked the sinner, and, though Charlotte was troubled for her daughter, Mr. Van Cott consoled her by protesting that there was no husband so good as a reformed rake, and who should know better than he?

Caroline and Sir Timothy were married a month later, at half-past seven of a frosty night, in the drawing-room of the Van Cott's house in Berkeley Square.

For Charlotte it had been a month of disagreeable confusion, endless interviews with mantua makers and milliners, a thousand pinpricks to heal, of creases to smooth away. For there was a great deal of criticism of this marriage; but that Charlotte put down to envy, rather than its acknowledged source. Nerves were strained, tempers uncertain; Charlotte was very glad when it was all over and she and her husband could settle down to their endless, tranquil honeymoon once more, and move only on the outer edge of the world of *ton* which was swallowing her child.

They were living in an exciting period, one of the turning points of history - the year 1814. Caroline was on her honeymoon when the Emperor of France signed his abdication, said farewell to Queen Hortense at Malmaison and drove away in a closed carriage down the long road to Fréjus on his way to Elba.

'I shall never forget the sensation the news made in London,' said Charlotte to her daughter Georgiana. 'Everyone seemed drunk with it.' Georgiana could not remember a time when there was no war; Charlotte had almost forgotten it.

All Europe broke into song and dance; the Congress danced in Vienna; Berlin revolved in the steps of its own waltz; Russia performed to a shy tune of her own; London was positively Continental. The Prince Regent was in his element at last. England should dance and dine and drink and dress as extravagantly as Europe.

Caroline was eighteen. Sir Timothy, prodigiously proud of his bride, took her to see all the royalties, the big blond Czar in his tight uniforms, the Grand Duchess of Oldenburg, who was thoroughly enjoying the opportunity to put her finger into a thousand political pies, and, of course and even earlier, the exiled and restored royalties of France. Young Lady Grant was presented to the King of France at his levee at Grillon's Hotel in Albemarle Street and introduced to the Duchesse d'Angoulême.

'The poor Duchesse covered her face with her hands,' Caroline told her mother, to whom she still ran daily with her news. 'Her eyes have been so much weakened by weeping that they are quite inflamed. But the grace and dignity of the King's manners are delightful.'

Charlotte was not listening to the chatter. Her memories of twenty years ago were strangely stirred: Madame d'Angoulême was once again a child and prisoner in Paris, shivering under the shadow of the guillotine and a band of young men were singing:

O Richard, o mon roi
L'univers t'abandonne.

For this day they had died.

Caroline went on with her gossip. 'They talk of Princess Charlotte's marriage to the Prince of Orange. She is very clever, but wilful and hoydenish, I always think.'

Georgiana wanted more news of Princess Charlotte, whom she had not seen for a long time. Caroline laughed.

'She is very like you, I think,' she said judicially. 'There is quite a remarkable resemblance about the mouth and eyes. Indeed you might be her sister, rather than mine, Georgie, and heiress to the future Queen of England. Would you like that, child?'

Charlotte started and paled a little; this opened up vistas down which she did not want these girls to look; others had remarked, not without malice, that Georgiana was remarkably like Princess Charlotte of Wales.

Caroline went on: 'The Prince Regent knows how to manage her. They never allowed her to see the Prince of Orange. That, of course, awoke her interest, as she heard so much about him, and she begged her father to invite him. He refused, saying he was sure she would dislike him and show it. She promised good behaviour. They met, and spent the whole evening in whispering. Then Princess Charlotte begged her

father to make a proposal to him at once. He refused and she wrote three times to the Prince before morning, who told the Prince Regent next day he had never seen the woman with whom he was so struck. Then the engagement was announced. This is the Prince Regent's own account of the affair and may be relied upon in every particular.'

Caroline told her story with great animation; Charlotte gave her a satirical look: 'It would be the first time his word could be relied on.'

Caroline was shocked. It was a subject on which she and her mother were never likely to agree, but she wondered, not for the first time, what was the cause of the quarrel between them. Old tales, of course, she had heard, but never the certainty - a dangerous subject, nowadays, and better, perhaps, left alone, though one could not help speculation. She glanced curiously at Georgiana, then, meeting her mother's amused, yet troubled, eyes, looked hastily away.

'I am having a wonderful time, mamma. At Lady Jersey's the other night they were dancing the quadrille known as "The Battery". Count Meerfeldt said the last time he danced it was with Buonaparte and Princess Borghese at Monza. Buonaparte danced extremely ill.'

'It is hardly an occupation for a soldier,' Charlotte said drily.

'Can such a man remain inactive, mamma, do you suppose, one who has been the scourge of the world?'

'Are they not satisfied? They have caged him.'

'He might escape.'

'Perhaps. Do they wear the new French head-dresses in town, Caroline?'

'Grassini assures me that they are not worn in good society, mamma, and she considers herself as leading the *ton*.'

'In a pair of light flesh-coloured pantaloons close to the shape in which I hear she appeared at the Opera on Tuesday?' Charlotte's satirical eyebrows were lifted.

'She wore the thinnest white shawl drapery over these, which clung to her, making nakedness more nude,' Caroline confessed. 'But her acting with Tramezzani was the finest thing I ever saw, mamma, and I could not repress my tears.'

'You enjoy the fashionable world, Caroline?'

'Indeed I do, mamma, London is wonderful, the whole population is in the streets. I saw the arrival of the Emperor of Russia; he had been to Carlton House and was on his way to the Pulteney Hotel driving in Count Lieven's carriage. He bowed repeatedly, very gracefully, from his balcony. The next day there was the King of Prussia with his three fine sons driving in state to call on the Queen at Buckingham House. We also saw Blücher, a venerable looking man with a beautiful countenance and the finest silver hair. There are countless multitudes every day in Hyde Park to see the great ones.'

'There always are,' remarked Charlotte drily, but Caroline did not heed:

'We went to a party at Lady Salisbury's; the Prince Regent was there, covered with orders, and the Emperor of Russia and the King of Prussia, who wore his Garter and very loose and ill made boots, but they came late and only stayed an hour.'

'I hear the Emperor of Russia is a coxcomb, a dancing dandy, who would rather introduce the waltz at Almack's than face Buonaparte in the field.'

'Oh no, mamma, he is as brave as a lion, but perhaps too much under petticoat government. I danced with him at White's Club in an English country dance. He seemed to enjoy that as much as waltzing, and indeed he is very agreeable.'

'Nevertheless I think public curiosity has been completely satisfied, and these sovereigns may now fix the date for their return home without occasioning us much grief. The Princess of Wales will not be sorry to see their backs.'

'Oh mamma, have you been visiting that dreadful woman?'

'My dear, I often visit the poor woman, who has been most

deeply wronged.' Caroline hesitated, as if about to protest, then, the temper of her generation overcoming her own freedom of speech encouraged by her indulgent upbringing, changed the subject. Her parents, she knew, were hardly likely to change their sympathies as between the Prince Regent and his wife through any arguments of hers, though she now moved in the world of *ton* in which their attitude appeared quite shocking.

Mrs. Van Cott herself went to a great Victory Ball at Mrs. Coutts's, and sat on a sofa, for the most part, watching and talking to her friends; most of them did not dance very well, especially in the newer dances and that licentious exercise, the waltz, and as she was still an exquisite performer in the country dance and minuet, and indeed, though she had practised it only in secret, the waltz, she preferred to look on rather than be trampled. In her youth it had been more fashionable to lounge on a sofa talking cleverly to a lady than to dance with her; men only danced when they were obliged, or, in self-defence, when they were conscious of their lack of wit. But no one *could* talk cleverly nowadays, the art of conversation seemed quite dead; and so, it seemed, they all knew how to dance. Society was growing more and more mindless, and more and more dancing mad, especially over these waltzes and quadrilles. Everyone said that now the war was over an irresistible flood of waltzes would submerge England from end to end.

Mrs. Van Cott, curling her lip in that characteristic way which had once subdued her husband and made him nervously silent in her presence, regarded contemptuously this very vulgar post-war world which amused itself in the drawing-rooms of the great into which it had been floated by successful army contracts. It was not only that its clothes, its manners, its dances were so vulgar, experience might modify all those, but its enthusiasms were equally crude and shocking. Look at that Byron creature, well born, 'certainly, but extremely ill-brought-up, over whose flashy poems all the young women,

including her own Caroline, gushed and twittered in the most ridiculous way. All the ladies ranged on sofas were agreed on this subject, and, though some of them were ravished, in secret, by his Oriental tales, Charlotte was quite sincere when she confessed that she found his poetry sad nonsense, prodigiously inferior to the very worst of Mr. Pope.

'If I must admire modern writing give me this anonymous writer who has just sent forth *Pride and Prejudice*,' she said to the middle-aged beau at her side.

'It is supposed to be by a lady,' her companion said doubtfully. 'Lord Byron says that no woman can write.'

'Indeed,' Charlotte remarked drily. 'I always supposed that Madame de Sévigné had some ability.'

Charlotte went to no more balls, but Caroline never missed one of importance; the child seemed as dancing mad as any vulgarian, and there appeared to be no end to all the celebrations of the peace, everywhere gaiety and cheering, the huzzas of victory which disguised essential instability, for they did not rejoice so heartily in France; instead they drank an odd toast to '*Le violet qui paraît au printemps*'.

In London, however, there was jubilation such as had never been seen before; Mr. Pitt's belated epitaph, Charlotte thought a little wryly, expressed in endless dancing, country-dances, waltzes and quadrilles, handsome soldiers dancing with bright-eyed débutantes, and every now and again the boom of the Tower guns drowning the sweetness of the fiddles, hero-worship and the small vanities of conquering heroes, a mob drunk with victory, thinking all its troubles at an end. There was, as comic, or, if one regarded things from another angle, as tragic, relief, the Prince Regent's quarrel with his vulgar, ill-used, eccentric and courageous wife, a quarrel in which all England took sides.

It was a mad time; all types, all classes, gave way to the hysteria of relief, to an irresponsibility which swept from end to end of the land in the wake of the waltz. A few, old-fashioned,

people regarded the hysteria with as much horror as they did the new craze.

'Promiscuous,' they cried. 'Gentlemen not only put their arms about the waists of ladies but *keep* them there. Disgusting! Where will such familiarity, such immodesty, end?'

There were enough of such old fograms to form a party, a second party in a bitter feud; either one belonged to the Waltz Party or to the Anti-waltz party, which called itself the Country dance Party, and put up a very spirited fight, though there was no doubt that it was a losing one, and that the other daily gained ground. The Russian visitors were great supporters of the waltz party, and chief of them was the Emperor Alexander, who was rather good looking, very susceptible, and a great favourite at Almack's, which, of course, set the *ton* for the rest of the world. The Russians, being a novelty, had made quite a stir in London; the chief sensation was Count Platoff with his Cossacks, whose behaviour was very odd, not to say unpleasant. Lord James Murray, most hospitable of gentlemen, had lent them his very fine house in Great Cumberland Place; there they preferred to sleep herded together on the staircase instead of in the very handsome beds, which, considering some of their habits, was, perhaps, as well.

'My love, you would never believe,' voices were lowered and heads pressed together as unpublishable details of the behaviour of the Russians were exchanged.

The invasion of London was, on the whole, as great a success as the Prince Regent had anticipated; old Blücher got tipsy and the Czar mistook the Prince Regent himself for some minor officer of the law and was a little off hand with him, but otherwise the visitors had a great success. There were reviews in Hyde Park and a Naval Review at Portsmouth at which Billy Clarence, who was one day to be King William IV, was extremely happy in his odd, unexpected way. London was full and quite mad.

'Where all the people are lodged I cannot imagine,' said Mrs.

Van Cott. There were, of course, a few diversions by partisans of the Princess of Wales, who thought herself slighted by the neglect of the royal visitors, as indeed, poor woman, she undoubtedly was, but one could not be on good terms with the Prince Regent and go calling on his wife; so the visitors chose discretion rather than kindness, and were, some hoped, ashamed of themselves.

It all came to an end at last and London saw them depart as philosophically as she had seen them arrive, having watched too many royalties come and go to be unduly impressed by any of them, which was, the foreigners considered, a very odd attitude of mind and were hardly compensated, as far as their pride went, by the absence of such homely accompaniments of royalty as anarchists and bombs. Caroline saw the last of the royalties and ran happily to tell her mother of the breathing space in her extremely busy life.

'The royals are gone,' she cried. 'And now we can fête the real heroes. Our own Duke and hero Wellington will soon be here. I wish old Blücher had stayed.'

The gaiety began again. There was a magnificent masquerade for Wellington at Burlington House, two thousand guests most sumptuously arrayed, though the outstanding figure was Lord Byron very sombrely attired as a monk.

It was a great success, though Sir Lumley Skeffington's vanity was mortally injured by that madcap Caroline Lamb, who tore his red Guard's coat from his shoulders and left him in his waistcoat in the centre of the room. The Duke appeared to be enjoying himself, though Mrs. Van Cott professed to doubt it when she heard that the Prince Regent had arranged a fête for him. Charlotte's mocking voice quizzed her excited daughter:

'You must tell us about that.' Her tone changed to sweetness. 'Enjoy yourself, child, you will only be young once, and only once, I hope, a bride. Are you happy?'

'As a bird, mamma.' The radiant face bent to kiss her. 'Sir

Timothy is prodigiously kind. He says we may go to Paris in the spring.'

But when the spring came the little man in the grey overcoat and cocked hat was marching down the white road to Cannes, the drums drowned the fiddles and all Europe was in a state of panic once more. It lasted just a hundred days; there were constant runners, and streams of refugees, and then, for a few days, there was an ominous absence of reliable news, strained eyes and hushed voices, and then rumours – a battle? Near Bruxelles? And then a terrific shouting in the streets:

'Wellington is safe,' the London mob shouted. 'We don't know what the news is, but Wellington is safe.'

More soberly the details followed. There had been a victory at Waterloo, the Emperor was in flight.

They drew a long breath in London, and then all the polite world began to pack. Caroline and her husband were in the van of the rush across the Channel.

They landed at Calais after a passage of three hours. Was she really in France? Caroline found it hard to believe it, for all the people at the inn spoke English, the rooms were remarkably clean, and the bill as extravagant as in England. She pinched herself to make sure she was not dreaming, but this was a dream come true; Paris, Paris which had always been the goal of her fancy's pilgrimage, was no more than a day's long journey from her now. In the road below her windows the water carriers wereshouting 'Eau, eau, bonne eau' and the housewives of the town were going home from market with large baskets on their arms in a quite un-English way. Indubitably France. A band of urchins in rags was singing an indecorous and most ungrateful song:

Bientôt plus de guerre ·
Tous les rois sont morts.
Il n'y a que l'Angleterre
Qui résiste encore.

Tiggi riggi ding dong,
Tiggi riggi ding dong.

All the roads were full of English travellers hasting to that Paris from which they had been exiled for so long, the Paris of the Bourbons which would now resume its gaiety.

Owing to the great run upon the road the Grants had to have postboys, quite in the old style, which amused Caroline very much. The postilions wore huge jack boots and encouraged their horses with strange noises which made her laugh again. But her laughter died as they pushed their way through the crowd of beggars wailing 'Un sol pour l'amour de Dieu. Je meurs de faim, je meurs de faim'. This was pitiful. Had Napoleon's triumphs left nothing but disaster for his people? Was beggary the aftermath of war? She emptied her good-natured husband's pockets of small change.

She forgot her momentary distress as they drew near Paris, and her anticipation reached fever heat when at last she saw the heights of Montmartre etched against the sky. She caught Sir Timothy's arm in her excitement, and he patted her hand in ironical kindness.

'Caroline's dream at last come true?' She nodded, too excited, for once, to speak.

It was eleven in the morning, and, after they had seen their apartments in the newly-named Hôtel de la Paix, they walked out to view the city. In the Tuileries Gardens the orange trees were in full bloom, the fountains were playing, and under the king's windows groups of young people were dancing La Ronde and singing 'Vive Henri Quatre' instead of the forbidden 'Marseillaise'; all very well for the young, but the older people, Caroline thought, looked very *triste*, which, surely, was ungrateful?

Sir Timothy thought that perhaps it was not. 'Look at the very odd people, my love, who occupy the Paris streets.'

It was true that they were odd; there were Uhlans and Life

Guards, Austrian Dragoons and gigantic Cossacks staring at the buildings, and Prussian officers driving through the streets with laurels in their hats. Hussars jingled by, and there stared at foreign statues in Paris that selfsame little figure which had caught the Duke of Wellington's eye as it stared at statues in the park at Bruxelles and drawn from him a pointing finger and a grim 'It all depends upon that article whether we do the business or not.'

Well, the article had won Waterloo for him and now sturdily trudged the Paris streets with a great deal of good humour towards the Frenchies. Peaceable and stolid, the British infantry might not be intolerable to the Frenchies, but there were bivouacs in the wide avenues and Guardsmen in the Bois, and a great many, a great many too many, Prussians in the Champs de Mars. Caroline agreed with her husband that perhaps Paris had good reason to look *triste*.

The child must have her mind improved, Sir Timothy insisted; so Caroline was taken to the Louvre, where she was ecstatic over the Apollo. They were removing all the pictures belonging to Prussia. It seemed a pity that Napoleon's fine collection of other people's property should be dispersed. The Parisians talked sullenly of the Prussian pillage when that tactless people reclaimed their own - and, of course, a little more. The palace of St. Cloud made Lady Grant weep, for every apartment was filled with Prussian soldiers who threw their dirty beds on the magnificent silk sofas which had decorated the background for the Empress Marie Louise.

Caroline was equally astonished at the magnificence of the public buildings, the narrowness and dirtiness of the streets, the splendid apartments of the rich and the miserable hovels of the poor, and the thirst of the whole population of Paris for amusement. The rage for spectacles was so great that above twenty theatres were filled every evening by people of all kinds. The Opera was as fashionable as in London and the ballets excelled any she had ever seen. At the Opera House *Œdipe et Télé-*

maque was given, but she did not enjoy it, for the house was very dirty and full of soldiers with strange and uncouth habits.

Paris, like London, was dancing mad. A cynic of an older generation remarked to Sir Timothy: 'This is evidently a dancing generation. I think people's wits live in their heels. They certainly cultivate nothing else.'

'The French dance as if they feared they might not live to see a to-morrow,' Sir Timothy replied.

Caroline laughed at him as she laughed at nearly everything nowadays from sheer joy of life. There were innumerable balls at which she waltzed until even she was tired. Then, for an experience, she tripped back into the past and danced a minuet with old Vestris. She flung herself into the new life with extravagance, not only into its gaieties but into its affectations. She must, of course, curb her natural liveliness to be in the mode as regards sensibility.

'I want *soul*,' she sighed, rolling her eyes a little in the modish manner. 'And there is little of that article to be met with either in the splendour of the Court or the intoxication of military reviews, or in the insufferable arrogance of newly acquired wealth. It would be delightful to pass one's time between the majestic sublimities of nature and the society of one's soul-mates.'

Sir Timothy with difficulty retained his gravity, and very kindly refrained from asking what part her pretty dancing feet were to play in this life of sensibility with Nature and the Soul.

'The ladies wear too much rouge for the good of their souls, my love, I trust you will not follow them.'

Caroline promised; indeed she thought the heavy use of rouge very disagreeable, and was hardly aware that her rose-leaf skin made the poor rougers even heavier with their substitute. And she only talked of 'Soul', Sir Timothy noticed, when she was too tired to dance.

Sir Timothy was renewing his youth in the enchanting freshness of his pretty wife; she moved, he thought, with a rare

flight into imagination, like a perpetual ripple of airs from *Figaro*.

They went to call on an old flame of his. 'Madame Crauford,' he explained, 'was not quite *comme il faut*, not visited by people in the best society, but prodigiously lively and entertaining.' Madame's broad red face and vast proportions made Caroline stifle a laugh. That she should aspire to lead the fashions! Not that a leader of fashion in Paris seemed to have a difficult task, Lady Grant thought, for the women sitting in a circle round the room with their huge bonnets and cambric muslin gowns looked like unshapely housemaids. She was conscious, not vainly but with an artless pleasure and appreciation of beauty, of the exquisite folds of her own gown of creamy satin, high waisted, clinging to her graceful, slender limbs, and her little bonnet of chip with the moss rosebuds peeping coquettishly from under the brim. Dresses were as dear in Paris as in London, and not nearly as becoming. Caroline thought the ladies so frightful, so dowdy and so dull that it was with something of a shock that she listened to her amused husband's instructions that she must never call upon any of them before four o'clock for fear of interrupting a *tête-a-tête en boudoir*.

'I thought *mariages de convenance* had ceased since the Revolution,' she said naively.

'*Mariages de convenance* will never cease in civilized society, child. There are as many instances of domestic happiness in France as in England.'

Caroline was incredulous, and a little self-consciously obedient in the matter of early calls.

They went to the Opera and to hear *Richard Cœur de Lion* at the Théâtre Feydeau. M. Huet took the part of Blondel, and when Marguerite sang 'Vous étiez avec le roi' the house went wild with cheering.

'He went with the King to Ghent,' explained Sir Timothy, 'and the poor player was loyal when finer gentlemen betrayed him.'

Afterwards they went to call on Madame Crauford again, for she amused Caroline and was a bad habit with Sir Timothy. The Duke of Wellington came in while they were there and announced the capture of Buonaparte. The women all jumped up in an ecstasy of joy and embraced the hero, who took such demonstrations philosophically. The Duke, always susceptible to the charms of a pretty woman, smiled at his little friend Caroline and introduced her to Prince Metternich, who shared his weakness.

'I hope my head won't be turned,' laughed Caroline. 'There really is some danger.'

'Shall we go home?' Sir Timothy asked in mock alarm. Caroline gave his arm an excited squeeze. 'No, no, not yet. Look after me, Timothy,' she raised misty eyes to his.

'I shall be careful not to lose you, dearest love,' he answered with emotion. She sighed happily in his arms.

'It is lucky for me that my real happiness is centred in domestic life.'

'And lucky, perhaps, for me.'

Caroline liked seeing the sights better than paying visits. She was a little alarmed and not altogether comfortable among women whose outlook seemed so much more sophisticated than her own. Of all her new acquaintances she liked best Madame de Gontaut, an astute lady who won the child's confidence by protesting that she hated Paris and much preferred London. To Caroline Paris was enchanting, but London, of course, was home.

'Society here is a mass of intrigue of all kinds and jealousies beyond conception. Even your Ambassador has caught the infection and is jealous of the Duke. One cannot really be happy while living in the world of fashion,' she sighed.

But Caroline thought that, for a time, one could.

'Ah, there is a certain indefinable charm in the brilliancy of one's situation and in creating the envy of other women.'

Caroline blushed.

'But how heartless it all is,' Madame de Gontaut sighed. 'The hollow pleasures and make-believes of this, the gayest city, on the surface, in the world.' She raised her eyes to Heaven, clasped her hands together and murmured some of the prevalent cant phrases about the soul.

This made Caroline pensive; perhaps, after all, her happiness rested only, insecurely, upon her youth; perhaps the dark waters which had washed over Madame de Gontaut's soul might overwhelm her, too. She shivered as if with cold, but it was only, as they said at home, a ghost walking over her grave. How long would her youth and happiness last? Perhaps Madame de Gontaut's thought was the same, for she suggested a visit to the famous fortune-teller, Madame Le Normand, who had been consulted by Danton and Robespierre and all the *beau monde* of the Empire. She had predicted, they said, her divorce to the Empress Josephine.

Caroline, feeling very nervous, was ushered into a *cabinet d'étude*, very dimly lit, in which, on a large table under a mirror, were heaps of playing cards. The seeress arranged them and bade her cut them into packs with her left hand, then asked the day of her birth, the first letter of her name, and the first letter of the name of the place where she was born. Then, in a rather chanting voice, she began very rapidly to describe Caroline's character and past life, with such astonishing accuracy and detail that the girl's heart was beating fast, the blood singing in her ears; she felt faint and wanted to cry out, but her mouth felt dry; perhaps it was the heat of the room, though she found the prophetess uncanny.

'You will soon have an illness,' the chanting voice went on. The room swam round Caroline; she tumbled from her chair in a deep swoon.

Sir Timothy was very angry about this excursion; he was deeply anxious about his young wife, bitterly disappointed that this freak had lost him the hope of an heir. Caroline coaxed

him into good humour and hid her own disappointment and chagrin with a laugh.

'Well, was I not soon ill? The prophecy is fulfilled and over.'

She soon recovered and was as gay as ever, though an uneasy foreboding lurked at the back of her mind, and a fear that this disaster might change her kind indulgent husband. Her fear was vain; he was not changed, her gaieties were not to be curtailed. At the Théâtre François there was Mdlle Mars in *Le Mariage de Figaro*; that could not be missed, Sir Timothy protested, for the music of the opera seemed part of Caroline; she trilled its airs about the house, she moved to its rhythms; it held the very essence of her gaiety and charm.

Next morning there was a grand military review. The Emperor of Russia, the Emperor of Austria, the Kings of Prussia and France made very fine figures, or imagined that they did, but the Duke surpassed them all. Paris shouted herself hoarse over him.

'He is not a man but a god,' whispered the ladies with sweet blasphemy, and enough justification to excuse their lack of sense; for he stood to all the world as a symbol of the overthrow of the usurper. He came, much concerned, to inquire after Lady Grant's health. He dearly loved the company of pretty women and it sometimes seemed as if he preferred them to be silly, or perhaps he knew that sometimes, as in Caroline's case, a superficial silliness masked a good deal of sound sense; or perhaps, in her case, it was because he had known her as a baby playing with her bare toes on the veranda at Chinsurah and had forgotten her married state and only thought of her as a pretty, happy child. He was invariably kind to her, but he was not the only one who so regarded her; all the royalties made much of her, petted her as if she were indeed a child. She responded charmingly, especially to the Czar. Alexander was certainly very impressive, but to English eyes a little strange; he seemed to regard religion like those odd vulgar people the Wesleyans, and to quote scripture with a persistence and

fluency which was quite embarrassing. Madame de Krüdener might clasp delighted hands and roll her eyes thankfully to Heaven over her proselyte, and Monsieur de Metternich look deeply impressed, if a little uncomfortable, but the English were inclined to agree with the candid Castlereagh who said, 'The Emperor's mind is not completely sound.'

The men might look askance, but the women found him charming, though their real adoration was given to the Duke. There was a good deal of hero-worship and rivalry. Caroline, sometimes a shrewd observer and always a good correspondent, wrote home to her mother:

'We all adore the Duke but the French misunderstand our sentiments. I tell them that it is degrading our feeling to *persifler* about it and call it "Love"; it is something far higher. I cut off a lock of his hair, but you, I know, mamma, will understand this folly. He is the greatest hero in the world; I am overawed to know him, and very proud that he should notice me. We dined yesterday at the Ambassador's. I sat near Prince Metternich and opposite Prince Talleyrand. I never saw so diabolical a face as his; he is pale and has an expression of great cunning and a villainous mouth. He is frightful and his fiendish laugh still haunts me. Prince Metternich is extremely entertaining, he talks of Napoleon as if he adored him. I think I have seen all Paris. We spent a night at Malmaison and I slept in the bed which had been Josephine's. The poor Empress! The *concierge* told me that Napoleon adored her; he sometimes stormed over her extravagance but what he refused her to-day he was sure to give her to-morrow. How could a man who so loved her bear to put her away? One night we dined at Verrey's and I thought the dinner bad; everything in France tastes the same; I feel sure that in the restaurants they throw all that remains after dinner into a stock pot for the next day, it is not at all an agreeable thought. Salt spoons are never used and the French dip their knives into the salt. They have such odd manners, mamma. When I visited Madame Cheromi I passed

CONCERT AT THE DUKE'S 1815

through a dirty ante-room where they were at dinner into a bedroom; the atmosphere was malodorous but the bed was gilded! They seem to know nothing of cleanliness in the houses and streets.

'Yesterday there was a concert at the Duke's, the music was perfection. Nadermann played the horn. Afterwards the musicians struck up a polonaise and we danced all over the house. Then we began to valse. I am valseing a great deal, mamma, I hope you will not disapprove. And oh, mamma, the theatres. I never realized what sentimental and genteel comedy could be until I came to Paris and saw Fleury and Mdlle Mars. Comedy is *le ton de la bonne société*, to attend the theatre is its daily occupation, and consequently it is the boxes which decide the histrionic tastes instead of the pit as it is in London. I have seen enchanting *Figaro* and *Tartufe*, and never did Fleury act better, but I think, perhaps, for old associations' sake I like *Richard Cœur de Lion* best of all. Do you remember that song "O Richard, o mon roi? . . ."

Charlotte put down the letter.

CHAPTER II

SIR TIMOTHY, enjoying his wife's naive delight, was fearful of blunting it. Had she seen enough? Should they go home?

'Oh no, oh no. I have not seen half enough of Paris.'

'Enough for a time, child. We will continue our journey towards Geneva and Vienna. By way of Bruxelles, I think. Tell Marianne to pack.'

All the great men were leaving Paris. The Czar had already gone and the roads were lined with patrols of his Cossacks. The Emperor of Austria overtook the Grants as they rolled out of the city, and as etiquette forbade them to repass him, they rode in his dust to Montmiral. At Vertus there was a final magnificent review of the troops which had crushed Buonaparte, chiefly Russians, it seemed to Caroline, but that, her husband informed her drily, was because the Emperor Alexander had conceived a great idea of his own importance and of the mission given him by God. By the grace of God, at any rate, the Russian soldiers seemed to fill all the roads in France; they were eating hunches of bread and grapes at Epernay, and at Rheims bantering the washerwomen who stood up to their waists in casks fixed in the river. Caroline had supposed that the French could not be capable of deep feeling when she saw them dance in Paris, but she altered her mind when she heard their bitter complaints of the Prussians, who were nearly as plentiful as the Cossacks, and who took by force everything they wanted and ordered fifty *coups de bâton* for everyone who dared to resist. The French, she saw, were capable of hate if they had no other feeling.

Lady Grant had plenty of opportunity to indulge her newly developed sensibility, and gushed a good deal about the beauty of the scenery.

'The summits of the snow-capped mountains seem to kiss the azure sky and the fleecy clouds to draw the earth to Heaven,' she murmured in the approved manner, clasping her hands. It was a moment of ecstasy.

Sir Timothy's eighteenth-century mind did not admit of an excessive admiration for scenery; it bored him, as it bored Mr. Brougham, whom they met at Lausanne; they both preferred pretty women to mountains and clouds, and Caroline did not wholly disapprove of their preference. Mr. Brougham entertained her vastly; he certainly was a most extraordinary man, with his dirty neckcloth and twitching nose, rather like a rabbit's in its movements, and his flood of amazing information on every subject on this earth, and a little on Heaven. She was sorry when they left him behind at Lausanne.

Each time they passed an acquaintance from England Sir Timothy was reminded of the comforts of home. He was wet, cold, and often hungry among these damned mountains, and he feared that cramp from the cold would bring on the gout. His torments, he supposed, would be over once they reached Vienna, but he was disillusioned; the first night at the inn there he was devoured by bugs and caught twenty of them by candle-light. They found a better lodging next day and Sir Timothy was soon restored to his normal good humour.

Caroline was enchanted with Vienna, and more charmed than ever with her Paris acquaintance, Prince Metternich. Sir Timothy encouraged this penchant, which appeared to be mutual, for he was on a private mission to Vienna, of no great importance, but very delicate and secret; even his wife knew nothing of it, though she knew what was required of her. They ended every evening at the Metternichs', no matter where they began it. The Viennese were great tea drinkers and their tea drinking soirées began at eight o'clock, the table being spread as if for dinner, and laden with fruit and cake, the lady of the house presiding over the tureen and distributing sugar and cream to all the party. It diverted Caroline, who



CAROLINE CHOSE A NEW GOWN IN VIENNA

[*Wiener Mode*: 1816]

was used to the quickly dispatched business of an English tea-drinking, and reminded her of the antiquated usages of her forefathers, for Prince Metternich's tea parties lasted till two or three in the morning, the society being very select and chiefly diplomatic. Sometimes they had charades, but if there were not many people Princess Marie Metternich played waltzes and the old Princess talked the scandal which she dearly loved. Caroline was curious about her.

'Her history is that of most German wives,' said Sir Timothy carelessly. 'Her husband was faithless; she consoled herself. The children of the liaison, as you will notice, are distinguished by their black locks from their fair sisters, the children of the Prince.'

Caroline, as usual, danced as much as possible; she was enthralled with the music and dancing of Vienna and wrote to her mother about it:

'Unless one has seen waltzing in Vienna one can form no idea of the life and spirit of that dance. It is extremely quick and only three or four couples dance at a time; they then range themselves beside those who are waiting until their turn comes to begin again. This prevents all confusion. We afterwards danced the German quadrille and "Mon Grand' père" a funny romping dance with which all Viennese balls are concluded, it is danced with a *sang froid* which makes a queer contrast to the ludicrous attitude of the dance and gave me fits of laughter. This is going to be a prodigious long letter, I foresee, mamma, for so much happens, I have so many things to tell you, and, as we set out to-morrow for an excursion into Hungary, I cannot tell when I shall have leisure to write to you again. One of our excursions was to the Caltenberg, the retreat of the Prince de Ligne; the view from the terrace where we dined is very fine. The town of Vienna lay at our feet and we could trace all the windings of the Danube, with the battlefields of Aspern and Wagram on the opposite bank of the river. General Walmoden described the battle of Wagram to us.

'On our way to the valley of Heinberg we rode through the royal chase of Schönbrunn and saw quantities of wild boar who came to be fed at the call of a whistle. I gave a tea party last night after the theatre; Count Trauttmarsdorff sent the Tyroleans, they sing beautifully in parts, the wildest airs without music, but, of course, the chief music in Vienna is the one and only Mozart who seems here in his own city a thousand times more enchanting even than at home. Oh mamma, I am as happy as a bird and Sir Timothy is kindness itself.'

Sir Timothy, busy with his secret diplomacy, was delighted that his wife should be so well entertained. He was exceedingly diverted by his adaptable Caroline's ability to suit herself to any company, and, as quickly as a monkey, pick up its tricks. He was often absent for a few days and during his absences confided his wife to the care of Princess Galitzin, a *belle esprit* who had travelled perpetually in search of happiness, but without success. She had been, indeed she still was, extremely handsome, with a mass of raven black hair which she sometimes hid with a flaxen wig. She kept a very amusing company which sometimes entertained itself with patience and sometimes with fortune-telling. One of the gentlemen who usually attended her had been a pupil of Lavater and professed to describe character by handwriting. Count Walmoden, who had just returned from a visit to the Emperor Alexander at Warsaw, was frequently there and had some most diverting pieces of scandal to relate; he had made himself very popular by dancing and making love to the women; he found it a great help in diplomacy; he was quite ready to make love to Lady Grant.

Vienna filled for the marriage of the Emperor Francis in November. The entrance of the Empress was magnificent. Walmoden commanded the troops, the streets were all hung with tapestry and decorated with flowers, the palace was fitted up and lighted as it had been for the celebrated Congress which had preceded the battle of Waterloo, the large ballroom,

entirely of white and gold was lit by thousands of wax candles. Caroline was prodigiously impressed, but most of all her attention was attracted by the young Napoleon, who sat in the box prepared for him in the gallery with the Duchesse de San Carlos and looked full of reflection far above his years. Poor child, she thought, he should be gay as fits his years, not sad and aloof amid such gaiety; how far has been the fall of the little King of Rome! Will he climb up again? Her kind heart was touched by his desolation; her romantic thought soared into his questionable future. Sir Timothy roused her from her pensiveness; the ball was more splendid than anything she had ever seen, such costumes, such jewels.

'It is the custom in Vienna at *bals parés* to borrow or hire as many jewels as possible,' Sir Timothy informed her drily. 'The head of the family who is present wears all the genuine treasures, the others what they can. Prince Esterhazy's dress, I am informed, is worth more than a million pounds. That might impress the Prince Regent.'

It was certainly magnificent, being that of a captain of the Hungarian *garde noble*, scarlet cloth embroidered from head to foot in pearls. The tops of his yellow boots and his spurs were set with diamonds, his cloak, lined with the finest fur, was fastened with a splendid cluster of diamonds, as was also belt, sword knots and sword; a heron's feather and aigrette of diamonds rose from his fur cap, whose loops were of pearls and diamonds. A very splendid fellow and magnificent seigneur looked Prince Esterhazy; but all the Hungarians were striking, the women like the men appearing in national dress with long picturesque veils which swept the ground.

Caroline Grant, charming in Court dress of azure brocade and silver, felt like a sparrow in simplicity amid this splendour, but Prince Metternich told her that on the contrary her face with the sweet freshness of the rose made the women all look old and faded. Caroline was having a prodigious success with Prince Metternich, who was in the grip of a rare mood of

sincerity, and confided to her his innocent but devastating passion for sweet Julie Zichy, the saddest, sweetest emotion which he had ever felt, and which must go for ever unrewarded. Caroline was all sympathy, though in Julie's place she would have been equally unbending; she was charmed with the Prince, but disliked his family, though, for Sir Timothy's pleasure, she was constantly in Princess Metternich's company. The Princess would serve the tea herself, most ungraciously, scarcely deigning to notice the entrance of her guests; after tea she wrapped herself in a shabby shawl and crept to a corner of the sofa where she drawled her grievances in German to anyone who would listen. Marie Metternich was almost as cold in manner as her mother, and as clever as her father's daughter might be expected to be, very satirical and not at all popular.

The ladies sat at a work table and stitched at their tapestry, or sat on the long sofa with the cross Princess. Metternich walked up and down the room discussing politics. He was the most attractive man in the world, thought Caroline, enchanted by his courtly manners, sparkling wit and easy gaiety, yet she knew that he was subtle and a skilful intriguer, very reactionary, Sir Timothy said, and too influential in the modern world, which was full of new, revolutionary ideas; - Metternich thought he could put the clock back and restore a Europe which the Revolution and Napoleon had for ever destroyed. Sir Timothy, Caroline gathered, designed to influence him a little in the direction of more liberal ideas, and if his wife could help him . . . Caroline quite understood and played her part.

Caroline's head was really in danger of being turned by universal adulation; she was so fresh, so unusual, and a favourite in such high places that she was the queen of a little court. There was jealousy, of course, a good deal of scandal talked, a little real danger, but Sir Timothy, amused, gratified and sure of himself, kept just sufficient guard. He had her love and returned it; she was useful, too, undoubtedly, and wormed

out confidences guilelessly but with unconscious shrewdness, setting men off their guard by her sweet childishness which was not an affectation.

Life was an enchantment; she floated lightly as a feather on a stream. She was romantic, and the English ladies, whose prudery and vulgarity had made a bad impression in Vienna, had their reputations redeemed by her; she was, Sir Timothy said, more useful than a victory to England. The phrase set her thinking; she had, then, in a tiny way, a mission to perform; unconsidered happiness was not the whole of life; she must learn how she could be most useful; she had a new and pretty consciousness of her own importance as a missionary for England.

She sat, after two months in Vienna, in the corner of Princess Metternich's long sofa. The Prince was opening an interesting conversation about nothing at all. There was no political news, mainly owing to the irregularity of the posts and the tampering with the letters *en route*. New books never arrived and society was so exclusive that none but the very highest nobility were admitted into it and gossip formed almost the whole subject of conversation; Prince Metternich was extraordinarily clever at this kind of conversation. The talk turned on Buonaparte and his court, there was a little discussion of some new discovery in science, a romantic story was whispered, and there was a splutter of *jeux d'esprit*; then they had charades, and it seemed to Caroline that there was some whisper from which she was shut out. She was, for the first time, uneasy at Sir Timothy's absence. Monsieur de Caraman, the French Ambassador, was even more attentive than usual, or else Caroline, who was growing more sophisticated under his tutelage, was more aware of it. He informed her, with solemnity, that conversation was not a gift of nature, but an art which required cultivation, and, thinking it wise to listen more often than she talked, she learned some strange facts, particularly about St. Petersburg.

'*Un Russe est un singe greffé sur un ours*' she learned, and that the reputation of a woman at St. Petersburg was not much thought of. Not that, for that matter, it was highly considered in Vienna; women were not, as in England, disgraced for licentiousness; the Viennese Court, though extremely correct, did not interfere with the morals of the nobility, and admission there depended solely upon the number of quarterings. The prudishness of the English was regarded as a rather ridiculous affectation, and there was some astonishment that anyone as sensible and charming as Lady Grant should have no ear for passionate declarations, but should laugh at them enchantingly as at a good joke. The suspicion crossed her mind that this was a conspiracy; that of set purpose they designed to test her faithfulness. Alert for the danger, she laughed in secret at the absurdity of the conspirators' hope. As if they could use her as a weapon to stab her husband!

She still loved Sir Timothy devotedly, though less extravagantly than she had done at first; but how deep did the roots of that devotion go? Had she any depths under the sunny shallows of her charm? Her parents, who loved her dearly, had often doubted it; she was good-humoured and affectionate, but neither quality had suffered any strain in her happy home, with her indulgent and tranquil parents. Sir Timothy was not a man who considered such things; he had found her as he wanted her - an affectionate, enchanting toy. Caroline herself was not introspective; her sensibility was no more than a pretty affectation; she took things as she found them, and hitherto everything had been extremely good.

There came a moment in Vienna when her quality was tested; her intuition had warned her at Prince Metternich's that more than she knew of was afoot. Sir Timothy was in Hungary, not for the first time, and a spiteful woman intimated that he was agreeably occupied. Caroline was startled, incredulous, then angry. The story seemed in every mouth; at last she could not doubt its truth. She held her head high, and,

if her laughter lacked spontaneity, its artificiality passed unnoticed. But alone in her bedroom she was overwhelmed with bitter grief; her pride was stung, her heart wounded. She wept uncontrollably until she could weep no longer; but tears, she reflected at last, held no remedy; she was invisible for a day, with the *migraine*, her maid informed inquirers, then she re-appeared, a little pale but otherwise herself.

She had faced her trouble, regarded it from all angles, and taken a decision. She knew her husband's reputation; she had, eyes open, married an acknowledged rake. He was, she knew, beyond question devoted to her; his faithlessness, then, could not touch any fundamental thing, it was casual, of no real importance; she must discover her own limitations so that it should not occur again. She would not wreck her marriage on her own hurt vanity, or even on her wounded heart; she must have failed him; she would not fail again. Neither would she show her hurt; to these people such liaisons were of everyday occurrence, a matter of course; her woe, to them, would seem ridiculous. She stiffened her hurt pride.

It was, in fact, a liaison of vanity on the lady's part, of policy on Sir Timothy's; he was ashamed of it; the affair had no savour; he hoped his wife would not hear of it, the dust and ashes affair; it was not, in essence, infidelity at all.

Prince Metternich, seeing Caroline's shadowed eyes and understanding, very thoroughly, the whole affair, essayed tactful comfort with a discourse on the customs of good society and the uses of the *cavalier servente*. She was grateful, and, before Sir Timothy returned, had fought with her disillusionment, and laid down for herself some rules from which she would not deviate. Caroline had character after all, though, for the moment, no one had discovered it but herself; for she made no confidantes; she would not own herself a failure as a wife, would not allow her marriage to founder. She must make up her mind not to interfere with her husband's mode of life, never attempt to keep him from the society of persons whom she could not

admire, must indeed urge him to frequent it, for so he would most easily tire of it.

She hoped that temptation would be ended when they left Vienna behind them, but such a hope, of course, was vain. There was no more trouble for her there, nor on their journey home through Italy, but once more in England Sir Timothy resumed many of the habits of his bachelor life. He was a gambler, and contrived to lose thousands a night at short whist and at Newmarket. His wife passed many wretched nights burning oil at midnight, waiting for her husband's return. Lady Sefton, a silly woman, had given her some good advice.

'Never go to sleep at night, child, until your husband comes home.' Lady Grant followed it, and spoiled her pretty eyes through reading half the night by candlelight, since she could not wait thus with no occupation, if her temper were to stay serene.

Her youth and charm made her the target of spiteful tongues; every one whispered scandalous tales into her reluctant ear. The lovely Lady Barrington, sneering at her as a country girl, of no account, tried by every wile to steal her husband from her; the only effect was to make her devotion to him greater, and to convince her that if she could make him sufficiently happy at home he would not crave for the love of another woman; she exerted every power with which nature and study had endowed her to fascinate him as a mistress and enchain his affections as a wife. She was, she realized, naturally jealous, and, despite flattery, diffident; she distrusted her own attractions, and she was so fearful of offending that she hesitated before taking any step, but she won from him at last a surprised and rather amused promise that he would tell her if he were unfaithful. He gave the promise the more readily that he no longer felt any strong impulse to betray her, finding that she fulfilled every need that did not cry for exclusively masculine company. She was, he boasted in his cups, the world's wonder. She could

never be quite sure of him, of course, but she came in time to a strong belief in his loyalty, and so to a sweet serenity. She knew, of course, that he loved her, if less passionately, more deeply than he had done at first, and she won both his confidence and gratitude by a generosity which startled him.

They had been married four years and Caroline, grieving for the fact herself, feared that her childlessness might lose him. She wondered if the perpetual rattle in which she lived might not, perhaps, affect her health. They were at Brighton that summer, and Mr. Mahomet, the Oriental Vaporist, was giving courses of treatment. Lady Grant, of course, attended, since it was the mode, but found little benefit, and as she walked on the Steine with her husband, took a sudden resolve, if he were willing, to live quietly for a time at Maudline Hall.

Sir Timothy, quizzing the visitors, glass in eye, was inattentive:

‘What a multitude of people there are here, Jews, haberdashers and moneylenders without end, Mrs. Levi, Mr. Solomon and all the little Isaacs, mosaical whiskers and Israelite noses, the whole tribe of Benjamin in every shop and in every carriage. Of course the Prince Regent is here.’

His wife was unusually silent; Sir Timothy looked at her in some surprise. ‘Are you tired, my love?’ he asked solicitously.

‘A little. Would you mind greatly if we went to Maudline for a time?’

‘I should like it above all things. Estates are always the better for an occasional glance from the master’s eye. When would you like to set out, my love?’

‘At once.’

Sir Timothy, though a little surprised, made no comment. They set out two days later and only paused long enough in London to collect Georgiana and a governess from the house in Berkeley Square. Caroline said that the only companion bearable in solitude for a long visit was her sister. Sir Timothy

agreed. Women should be a great deal silent, he thought, and his little sister-in-law was the most silent young female he had ever encountered. Though not much given to deep thinking, Sir Timothy was no fool, and was fully aware that Georgiana's silence did not mask stupidity; she could speak intelligently enough when occasion called for it, but usually she was as companionable as a horse or a dog. He did not mind how long she stayed at Maudline, the longer the better since Caroline, ordinarily so full of spirits, seemed to have an attack of the vapours.

Georgiana was delighted to ride round the estate with her brother-in-law in the mornings and to walk with her sister in the park in the late afternoons. She was seeing a new, a pensive, Caroline, and was enchanted with the change, for a perpetual rattle disturbed Georgiana, who found no diversion in it, and left her heart always in the country peace. Maudline in that golden September was an enchantment to her. As Caroline paced the grassy glades in ridiculous London shoes Georgiana darted in and out among the trees with little exclamations of delight as she found some flower or shrub that was new to her, or heard an unfamiliar note from one of Sir Timothy's collection of rare birds.

It was on one of these evening expeditions that they came upon a woman near the gates, holding a small child by the hand. The child, a boy of six or seven, looked delicate, but the woman was evidently in the last stage of a decline. She had been pretty once and was still young. Caroline's kind heart was moved to a swift pity.

'What are you seeking?' she asked gently.

'I wanted to speak with Sir Timothy, my lady,' was the answer in a low, husky voice.

'A tenant of his?'

'Why no, my lady,' was the hesitating answer. 'My child . . .'

Caroline looked at the child quickly, and her heart missed a beat. She called her sister.

'Will you go to the house and tell Mrs. Williams I wish to see her in my boudoir, Georgiana, and let someone see if Sir Timothy is about.'

Georgiana cast a pitiful look at the poor young woman exhausted with a spasm of coughing, and darted away. Caroline put her arm under the stranger's elbow.

'Lean on me,' she said quietly, 'and I will help you to the house. Let me take the child.'

Sir Timothy, coming from the house quickly in answer to Georgiana's query, saw his wife moving slowly towards him, her head bent down to speak to the unfortunate creature on her arm, a little boy clinging to her hand.

'Tell me,' said Caroline quickly, but in so low a voice that the child could not overhear. 'What is your child's name?'

The woman hesitated. 'Tim,' she said at last. Their eyes met.

'I will look after him,' Caroline said steadily. It was a promise to be trusted and the desperate anxiety vanished from the stranger's eyes.

'Heaven bless you, my lady,' she said fervently.

In the pretty rose Dubarry boudoir which he had furnished for her Caroline faced her husband.

'Had you forgotten Mary Shepherd, Timothy?'

He was desperately embarrassed.

'I swear I have not seen her since I met you, Caroline.'

She moved impatiently. 'It was not that, but she is dying and should have been cared for.'

'I did not know,' he said unhappily.

'Sickness is seldom a man's affair,' his wife said drily, and Sir Timothy caught in her voice a tone of decision and character which he had not suspected in his pretty plaything. He did not like being criticized, any more than he cared for being faced by death in the person of a mistress whom he had discarded and forgotten; it reminded him of his age, which he

preferred to ignore, and of his sins, which, being a just man in the main, caused him acute discomfort when he saw the payment exacted from another for them.

'She shall be cared for,' he said, clearing his throat and putting a finger into his stock as if his discomfort were choking him.

'Mrs. Williams has my instructions to care for her. She has perhaps no more than a week or two or live. I will bring up your son, Timothy, as if he were my own.'

He turned upon her quickly with a protest upon his lips. Her eyes met his steadily; he saw her mind made up. He turned back to the window and drummed his fingers thoughtfully upon the pane. The child was his, no doubt of it, a delicate but pretty little thing. He liked children and had hoped his wife would bear him some. If she did not mind he would be glad enough to have the boy about the place; time enough later to send him away if he should have other children, or if Caroline should use him as a reproach. He regretted the unworthy thought as he turned and saw her wistful face. He came towards her swiftly.

'Caroline, my dearest, you are a woman in a thousand. Will you forgive me for causing you this distress?' His arms were round her but she pushed him away gently and stood with her hands upon his shoulders on tiptoe, reaching up till her eyes were on a level with his.

'It was not a sin against me, Timothy. And perhaps it helps to solve a problem. I am beginning to fear, dear heart, that I shall have no children of my own.'

He concealed the sharp stab of his disappointment.

'If I must choose between a child and my wife I should choose, unhesitatingly, my wife,' he said and meant it.

Her face brightened and she slipped a hand into his. 'Perhaps I am wrong, but in case of the worst this child shall be ours, dear love.'

CAROLINE MAKES A SUCCESS OF LIFE 1818-28

Sir Timothy was deeply touched. He raised her hand to his lips and pressed a kiss upon the palm of it. Caroline curled her fingers over it swiftly as if she would hold that kiss for ever.

So Caroline made a success of life.

GEORGIANA

Weber: *Oberon*



Over the dark blue waters,
Over the wide, wide sea,
Fairest of Araby's daughters
Say, wilt thou sail with me?

T

CHAPTER I

GEORGIANA VAN COTT had been born in Berkeley Square, which was the darkest square in London but had the finest plane trees, as she reminded her grandchildren when they were sceptical about the lost glories of Berkeley Square. Horace Walpole had lived there, Georgiana said, triumphantly, and with her own eyes she had seen Beau Brummell stroll across the square. Even her grandchildren, who seldom read and cared nothing for the past, were a little impressed by that.

It was only in old age that Georgiana developed this pride in her square; in her childhood she hated it and longed for green fields. After her sister Caroline's marriage she was generally in the country with her mother, who had entirely ceased to take any pleasure in the town. Charlotte had, after an absence of more than thirty years, taken over her own estate, King's Wimborne in Somerset, which she had not seen since she was six years old. It had been very well managed by its earlier tenant, but, like so many things, had deteriorated rapidly since the war in the hands of a profiteer who knew nothing of farming and regarded a country seat merely as a badge of his newly acquired gentility. Mr. Van Cott's heart was still in his own property in Lincolnshire, but he sympathized with his wife's longing for her childhood's home, and came to and fro very frequently, and very amiably, for an elderly gentleman suffering from sharp twinges of the gout.

Georgiana was exceedingly fond of Mr. Van Cott, and he returned her affection warmly, but there was between them a little strangeness, of which the child was more conscious than he. She could not have told at what age she became aware of her peculiar relation to him; it was whispered vaguely, rather than stated in plain terms, that she might look elsewhere

for a father, and look very high indeed. Never, indeed, to her life's end did Georgiana know for a certainty the truth about her parentage, but she was very early aware that it was generally believed that her father was not Mr. Van Cott. It mattered little in that age, since he gave no indication of such knowledge and was, in reality, fonder of this child than of his own daughter; Caroline was too volatile for an old man's companion; Georgiana's tranquillity was a refreshment and delight. She had, besides, from its unhopeful beginning, turned his marriage into a triumphant success; he never forgot to be grateful to the innocent cause of his belated happiness. The little girl was always eager to welcome him after long absence, but she was happiest when alone with her mother, whom she adored. Their hearts were in Somerset, and while Georgiana dreamed over old-fashioned books and such new ones as *Pride and Prejudice* and *Waverley*, her mother kept a finger in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* and approved her daughter's taste. They were extraordinarily happy together, remote from all the world.

The post-war world was restless and full of trouble, and of this, even in the heart of the country, they could not remain unaware. The bottom had fallen out of the life of the agricultural community, for the high war prices had fallen to famine level, starvation and unemployment stalked up and down the land, and in its wake, of course, fluttered whispers of revolutionary doctrine. At King's Wimborne there was less distress than there was in many other districts, for Mrs. Van Cott had no faith in her agent and inspected everything for herself, but she was too much of an aristocrat to run counter to her neighbours by applying revolutionary panaceas; wages might be too low, but she would not raise them above an economic level, and if there were too many labourers those unwanted must be turned away. She was businesslike and unsentimental, but none of her people died of starvation under the hedges; she examined cases for herself and relieved real

hardship; she was kind, but thought pauperization as a temporary measure preferable to weak yielding to what, undoubtedly, would prove permanent demands. Her maids and her daughter went in and out of cottages with food and clothes and firewood; Georgiana played the part of Lady Bountiful with sweetness and sympathy, and more real understanding of her people than her mother ever had, but neither she nor Charlotte knew anything of national economics, of the relentless inelastic laws which governed demand and supply; there had always been seasons of famine and seasons of plenty, and, obviously, always would be, and, though periods of depression bore more hardly on the poor than on the rich, naturally, yet the latter did not escape distress and inconvenience; it would be ridiculous to shoulder the burden of the support of the poor as a duty, but one did it as a grace. Charlotte had listened eagerly in her youth to Mr. Fox's charming vapourings, but since the shock of Mr. Pitt's death had turned her feelings into an extravagant posthumous admiration for that great man, her sympathies had been definitely Tory, though of the more enlightened school. Whig doctrines found very little sympathy in the country during the French wars, but landlords of her quality recognized that they had duties as well as rights; Mrs. Van Cott was not a person to shirk them, and her daughter dutifully shared her opinions and her trust.

Georgiana knew every cottage at King's Wimborne, and had definite views about adequate meals and children's clothes; she was a very practical young female, Mr. Van Cott told his friends with pride.

Georgiana loved the country. Mr. Van Cott, who had sent Caroline to school because her home was an unhappy one, had no such need for the younger girl, for Georgiana knew nothing of unhappiness or ill temper. A large share of her time was passed in study under the supervision of her governess, a pleasant young woman, a very talented artist in water colours

and an excellent French scholar. They read *Les Oraisons Funèbres*, of Bossuet, Fénelon's *Télémaque* and *L'Histoire des Français* by Sismondi, and, less fluently but still very well, the works of German and Italian authors. Under her mother's guidance Georgiana learned to perform very pleasingly upon the harp; she had a sweet singing voice, and danced – it was a family tradition – as exquisitely as Vestris himself. Summer and winter they took long walks; Georgiana rode, of course, with a careful groom in attendance when Mr. Van Cott was away; she had an excellent seat but less grace in the saddle than Caroline. It was a quiet life, broken by occasional excitements, a party of young people on a visit, a general election with bonfires, a riot, and other manifestations of enjoyment, a visit to the sea at Weymouth, which the old King had made so popular and where Princess Charlotte had been sent with her wistful defiant face to meditate upon the dreadful sin of refusing the husband chosen for her against her will. But most of the time Charlotte and Georgiana were alone in the old manor house at King's Wimborne, with excited letters from Caroline their chief contact with the outside world, and their greatest event the visit to church on Sundays, when the parson would preach a lively sermon in his topboots with spurs hardly hidden by his surplice, and a hardly concealed impatience to doff the cleric for the sportsman as soon as might be.

Mr. Van Cott brought news of the world, of London and Newmarket, and other affairs not suited to Georgiana's ears. He was very glad of her company, but had very little to say to her. What *did* one talk about to children in this new, rather mealy-mouthed age? Charlotte found it easy enough, and Georgiana, quiet as a mouse in company, had plenty to say to her mother when they were alone. What had she done when she was a little girl? What was the world like before Boney? Before Nelson? Had there really ever been a time before there was a war! Were things so very different? Of

THE STOCKTON RAILWAY PLAN 1818-1828

course papa was always right, but what did he mean when he said the country was going to the dogs?

Charlotte, faced by a battery of questions which she could answer, asked herself another. Mr. Van Cott snorted about decadence, but was it true? In honesty she could not think it; apart from a decay in etiquette and good manners, the world seemed to her a better place than it had been when she was young. On an impulse she departed from the age-old practice of parents and told her daughter so, with a laughing warning:

'When you grow old, Georgiana, and find the world so vastly different from your youthful vision of it, question yourself before you condemn: Is the change in the world, or has some stiffness grown in me?'

The words were uttered with intent but no great seriousness, yet Georgiana always remembered them; it was always her habit to think before she spoke.

All the same before Georgiana was twenty they realized that the world *was* changing, changing fundamentally, with more than those superficial differences which mark a generation's end. 'Reform', 'Reform' echoed, even in King's Wimborne. Labourers were clamouring for education, and the landlords growing more Tory in their opposition to it; for what was the good of teaching labourers to be discontented with their lot? It was all this talk of 'progress' and 'railways'. The Stockton and Darlington railway plan empurpled every country squire.

'What can be more palpably ridiculous than the prospect held out of locomotives travelling twice as fast as stage coaches? I for one shall always travel in a coach or a post chaise,' said Mr. Van Cott.

'These railways will be eyesores; they will ruin the beauty of the countryside,' agreed a crony.

'And their sparks will burn holes in the ladies' pelisses,' added Mr. Van Cott slyly. Charlotte laughed, and Georgiana

listened with wide eyes and some concern; yet, as Mr. Van Cott said truly, young females were less shocked at impious innovations than their elders, having a tendency to be frivolously excited at the prospect of something new.

'It is to be hoped that Parliament will limit the speed to eight or nine miles an hour,' said Charlotte cautiously, having an unregenerate desire to sample the abomination for herself.

The war, then, was over, and Mr. Van Cott and his cronies cherished the fond illusion that there would be a general return to a pre-war attitude of mind; their memories reached backward and they had a craving, vague but definite, for 'normal times' by which, of course, they meant the peace interludes of their youth, when things went well, such times as each generation pathetically regards as 'normal' but which are, in point of fact, no more 'normal' than the equally regular times of upset and war. This particular period of disturbance, however, had lasted longer than usual, and the past had faded and lay more than twenty years away in the pleasant mists of the eighteenth century, all rosy in retrospect, grey as it had often been in fact. The enchanting melodies of Mozart could never again become the regular accompaniment of their agreeable lives; there was harsher music and the echo of the drums in ears which could not accustom themselves to this perpetual, dizzy tinkle of the waltz.

It was a world full of discords; odd things had happened to the people, the patient labourers, who from time immemorial had gone about their humble unchanging tasks, were trudging over the fields, blackening under the haze of smoke, to work at strange machines in buildings with tall chimneys from which the dark pall of smoke poured out, spoiling the delicate greens.

London had changed less than the rest of England, but even there the aristocratic preserves no longer had strict limits, and the city merchants were moving westwards to the exclusive

DEATH OF PRINCESS CHARLOTTE 1817

squares, and the fashionable dinner hour had been changed to meet their needs.

Mr. Van Cott clung tenaciously to the past. On their rare visits to town he sometimes took Georgiana to a race-meeting; she loved the horses but thought it a very nonsensical way of losing money, though she enjoyed the vividness of the scene, the picturesque costumes of the crowd, the white beaver hats and sky blue jackets of the postilions and the Tom and Jerry costumes of her father and his friends, blue coats and brass buttons and shoes tied with a bow of black silk ribbon. She was extremely diverted by Mr. Van Cott's ditties which he still trolled forth in a rich, uncertain voice:

Four in hand
Down the Strand
Funny jigs
With knowing wigs;
Baxter's hats
That queer the flats;
Flashy whips
With silver tips;
Leather breech,
Pretty stitch;
High bred cattle,
Tittle tattle.

There was a shadow over England as Georgiana stepped out of childhood into girlhood; she shared the nation's bitter grief when Princess Charlotte died, for the pretty, wilful tomboy had been kind to her. England shook herself free from that gloom with difficulty; for a long time it seemed as if the whole prospect of the future had been darkened beyond relief; but such griefs must end, of course, and there was a good deal of excitement over the birth of a daughter to the Duchess of Kent, less excitement, however, than over *Don Juan* which everyone was reading just then.

The Van Cotts went, when Georgiana was thirteen, to visit Caroline and her husband in Paris, and Mr. Van Cott, who had reached an age when travelling appeared an abomination, thought that he would rather prolong his martyrdom than face a second instalment of it; they must make a short tour for the sake of Georgiana's education. They took their own horses and carriage, naturally, and a cook as well as a courier. It was an expedition of splendid misery; the innkeepers thought an English Milor fair game, and the English servants, acting on the customary assumption that all foreigners are deaf, shouted pigeon English at them perseveringly; professional beggars swarmed everywhere; there were no bathrooms, of course, and they were tormented at night by fleas travelling in battalions. Heating was quite unknown and they went to bed early in order to keep warm, though their expenses were fabulous.

Mr. Van Cott groaned, but Georgiana loved it, particularly the battle with the Customs officers, which no traveller escaped; Miss Van Cott was quite enchanted when one haughty old lady was caught smuggling clocks under her hoop, and the Customs officer sent for an iron rod and hooked down the time-piece which had betrayed her by ticking too loud.

Georgiana, of course, had been sufficiently coached by Caroline to be in ecstasy over the beauties of Nature, but in her heart she was not sorry when, in Munich, Mr. Van Cott said firmly that it was time they turned their footsteps homeward.

'Could we go once more by Chillon, papa?'

He pinched her chin.

'Another of Lord Byron's adorers?'

Georgiana blushed hotly; it was, naturally, true, though it was embarrassing to have attention drawn to it; she was glad that the big straw hat with its blue ribbon hid her face from her mother's laughing glance. They travelled home by way of

Chillon and Geneva, where she caught a glimpse of the poet himself and could hardly calm her dancing spirit under her mother's quizzical glance; for Charlotte did not share this adoration of her daughter's.

In London Georgiana was beginning to feel nearly a woman; she was tall for her age, and, until one caught a glimpse of her childish downcast face under the wide hatbrim, apparently mature. Her father told her, with a twinkle, that she must be sure to walk with her governess on the other side of St. James's Street lest the beaux in the bow window of White's should quiz her for a belle.

It was Sir Timothy's behaviour when she travelled with him and her sister to Maudline that convinced her she was a child no longer; Caroline could not forget her youth, but her brother-in-law treated her with the politeness due to a grown woman. Caroline found her very naive, and told her mother that the child was pretty but too much of a hoyden and a country bumpkin. Should she not see a little of the world? Reluctantly Charlotte acquiesced; for the next few years it would be her obvious duty to spend some time in the world and break down Georgiana's antagonism to it, and her reluctance to play the necessary part of a young lady of fashion. Georgiana, growing out of babyhood in the green woods and bright parterres of King's Wimborne knew nothing of the world of *ton*, except as it was reflected in Caroline's bright eyes. Caroline had woven into her being what she wanted from the eighteenth century, but had washed the threads first in the cleaner waters of the nineteenth; Georgiana, child of the new century, caught the reflection of the old century's elegance and candour in her sister's face and person, and copied what she admired. Georgiana moved with the swifter, more sentimental rhythm of the waltz, but she retained some of the grace of the minuet. She adored Lord Byron, but her mind had been fed with the clear cut metres of Mr. Pope, and she viewed history a little from Mr. Gibbon's angle; so far her mother was her

guide and schoolmistress, but Caroline, who had introduced her to the stormier metres of Lord Byron, necessarily had a powerful influence, not always sufficiently critical; fortunately, as her mother said, Georgiana's own taste inclined to the floral verse of Mr. Wordsworth, which Charlotte herself found insipid, but a welcome corrective to Byronic storm.

Charlotte, who had been so unorthodox in the matter of swathings for Caroline's little body, was equally unorthodox about swathings the mind of her other, dearer, child; Georgiana should follow her inclinations, but she must, as a duty, first take a glimpse at the best of the great world, the few great houses which barred their doors to the war profiteer, and where the wax candles still burned bravely though they were paling in the harsh light of the new gas.

It was not a very fortunate time to choose for an introduction to London, for the old King was dead and the Prince Regent was at last wearing that crown which must have lost some of its sparkle in his long wait for it. His health was not what it had been, and he was having trouble, even worse than the usual trouble, with his wife. Mrs. Van Cott committed the generous indiscretion of calling on the unfortunate Queen Caroline. King George heard of it, and would have cut her when she went to Court had he not been curious about that girl of hers. He hid his anger under that suavity which no one could assume so well. The child must come to Windsor; he insisted on it. And when was she to be presented? Only sixteen, was she? He had forgotten, time seemed longer than it used to do. He sighed sentimentally, and was annoyed at his old love's faintly satirical smile.

Caroline was inclined to think that her mother's sympathy with the Queen might have taken a less active form, but Mr. Van Cott approved her; it was the only indication that his wife ever had that the old jealous hurt still smarted; that, and her husband's solitary reticence about things which concerned her, the disposal of his property in his will. She did not know

if Georgiana was to share with Caroline; it was his only revenge for the hurt she had dealt him long ago.

Mr. Van Cott of course, had called on the Queen and made her offers of service. When her trial was abandoned he went out to see the illuminations and had his pocket picked. He watched the Coronation procession from a window, his wife and Georgiana at his side; they walked in the Green Park afterwards to see the fireworks. Georgiana was even more silent than usual, but she took that opportunity to say that she would not go to Windsor, and Mr. Van Cott, disapproving violently of Lady Conyngham as an associate for the child, was relieved that he had been saved the pain of forbidding an excursion which she might have pined for.

Poor Queen Caroline caused them no more embarrassment; a few weeks later she was dead, and all London in a tumult because the Government designed to smuggle her body away by stealth. The behaviour of the Government was fast turning Mr. Van Cott into a Whig . . . The Queen's wrongs had made the mild old gentleman quite eloquent with rage; he would not have a child for which he was responsible contaminated by the company of that villain George.

He had to climb down, of course, for the child's good, and Georgiana was presented. King George kissed her effusively on either cheek and regarded her with a very lively curiosity. He was a little disappointed, and showed it; the child was pretty, though not as pretty as her sister, but, regarded from a worldly standpoint, her country upbringing had been disastrous; she was tongue-tied and gauche.

Georgiana was fully aware of her shortcomings, and not wholly sorry for them; she would have liked to do her parents credit, but her chief desire was to come to the end of this horrid penance and fly back to the country. Only in the ball-room was she successful and happy; she was as pretty as a wild flower and danced exquisitely; she was ravished at the Opera and caught the *Freischütz* fever, but at Assemblies she was

a failure, and the modish tastes were dust and ashes in her mouth.

Charlotte, though she acknowledged that the fault was her own, was mortified at her daughter's failure; she had expected for her darling a success quite as brilliant as Caroline had had, and could not hide her disappointment. For the first time in her life Georgiana was out of harmony with her mother, and turned to Mr. Van Cott for understanding. He gave her a humorous sympathy, since he shared her boredom, but made the surprising suggestion that she should strike out a line of her own and go to parties given by the 'Blues' to show that she was superior rather than inferior to the modish empty pates. Caroline was horrified, Mrs. Van Cott perplexed, but Georgiana, to the astonishment of all of them, was eager. She was a born listener and had long cherished a hope that she might one day sit at the feet of people who talked about what, she supposed, were the really important things. Her most ardent desire, of course, had been to see Byron, but now Byron was lost she must be content with lesser gods, Sir Walter and Mr. Rogers and that diverting little man who sang so charmingly, Mr. Thomas Moore.

Mr. Van Cott, prodigiously diverted at the silent child's sudden revelation of her hidden tastes, took her to Miss Berry's and there she fell fathoms deep in love with young Arthur Quisite.

He was a handsome young man, with, at first sight, a modest and respectful manner, but Mr. Van Cott did not care for him: he wore his dark hair too long and a velveteen coat, and was, Mr. Van Cott said, a poseur and a fainéant; since his prospects were quite nebulous he should succeed in some respectable profession before he aspired to the hand of a delicately nurtured young female who knew nothing of poverty and mean shifts, 'and should not, if he could help it' stormed Mr. Van Cott.

This violent opposition was really due to the young man's



ARTHUR SET UP FOR A BEAU

[*Journal des Dames*: 1823]

taste in clothes, Charlotte reflected, with some amusement and relief. Mr. Van Cott, tenaciously of the eighteenth century, with neat powdered hair and immaculate knee breeches, abominated young Quisite's poetical coat, open neck and flowing locks of hair; they seemed to him degenerate and slovenly.

Arthur Quisite was the younger son of a Yorkshire baronet with more acres than good sense, so that they were neglected and mortgaged to the last blade of grass. The boy had been given the conventional education at Eton and Oxford and had done very well. It was the fashion to send young men of birth and brains to the Scottish Universities after the English ones, and young Quisite had gone to Edinburgh. After Edinburgh there had been a course of law with a special pleader and three years of reading, then he was called to the bar and went on circuit; but the life of a briefless barrister did not suit him, and, like his friend, Arthur Pendennis, he dabbled in literature instead. His father washed his hands of him; his godfather grew tired of being drained; even his affectionate aunts were beginning to grow restive under the constant applications for assistance from a young man who might have learned to practise law with honour and profit, when the youth published a novel. It was not, judged by any standard, a good novel, but there were some witty malicious pen-portraits in it; it was well puffed, and hit the public taste. It was very cleverly handled by the bookseller, and young Mr. Quisite, like a greater man, awoke one day to find himself famous. The day of poets was over; silver-fork fiction was the coming thing; Mr. Quisite anticipated fortune, but Mr. Van Cott, with more experience of the world, thought such anticipation, founded on one attenuated novel, distinctly premature.

It was not in his nature to be harsh with Georgiana, but he utterly refused an immediate consent to marriage, and dispatched her with her mother to King's Wimborne, with the strictest injunctions to think no more of marriage for at least a

year. He wished to stop all correspondence, but could not withstand the dear child's tears, so letters were permitted, and passed at frequent intervals between King's Wimborne and London. Caroline cried out upon this folly, but Caroline, after eight years of childless marriage, had borne her husband a son at last, and, though it was not possible for her happiness to be greater, it assumed a softer tinge; she concerned herself less actively in this weakness over Georgiana's love affair than she might otherwise have done.

Georgiana herself was docile, but wounded that they all cared so little for her real happiness, which, of course, could never survive apart from Arthur Quisite. A little aloof, therefore, to show her hurt, and make them sorry for their cruelty, she dreamed of Arthur, and wrote sedate letters suitable to meet her father's eyes:

'To tell you how truly I feel your tender professions of love to me and how much it will ever be my study to preserve your affection is wholly impossible. To make your happiness through life will ever be my first wish. Believe that to hear from you is my greatest comfort. I should be most ungrateful did I not approve of everything that was the wish of your amiable family, whose kindness and attention to me I am most sensible of. I am perfectly sanctioned by my excellent papa to write to you. He desires me to say that he hopes to look upon you as one of his children and has a very great regard for you which he is sure you will deserve. Believe me you are never absent from my thoughts and that I am with the most sincere affection

Georgiana van Cott.'

'I fear that you will find my letters very dull and stupid. My present situation affords very little subject for amusement, our days run on with little variety. Papa took pains during last winter at Bath to give me a taste for the pleasures and delights of the fashionable world, but the continued dissipation of these winter months has, indeed, given me a much greater

relish for that domestic quiet and those rational amusements which I find by experience are productive of the most real and lasting pleasures. You must not suppose from this that I have any wish to be a recluse, or the least objection to a reasonable proportion of gaiety and amusement that it is so natural to like, particularly if one is endowed with a lively disposition.'

Poor Georgiana was companioning an elderly papa of affectionate but gusty temper and an ailing mother who adored her and could not bear her to be out of sight; she needed that lively disposition to make Bath tolerable while her heart was aching for her love.

Young Arthur Quisite was no match for their daughter, both Mr. and Mrs. Van Cott hardened in that opinion as they heard fresh tales of his idleness. Mr. Van Cott said firmly that a young man without fortune should have a regular occupation at which he might be supposed to be likely to succeed; the bar, for instance was reputable, and offered good prospects to earnest young gentlemen who applied themselves with zeal, but novel-writing!!! No words could sufficiently express Mr. Van Cott's scorn.

Arthur, of course, had great ideas on the subject of literature, even letter-writing.

'An eminent lord observed (Georgiana supposed he meant Lord Chesterfield) on the subject of letter-writing that you should sit down to write what you think, not to think you what should write, embellishments of style imply study and deep thought which give a stiff and formal character to letters. Believe me it is ever a pleasure to write to you but I am at a loss what to say; it requires more cleverness than I can boast of to be able to write a great deal about nothing. You have only yourself to thank, however, for making me so vain as to suppose you would be uneasy at not hearing from me, though it is to read nothing. This is the plain and simple truth told without either embellishment of style or study of sentiment.'

Georgiana, poor innocent, thought this a beautiful letter,

proving the utter sincerity of her lover; Mr. Van Cott, had he read it, would have considered it but one more sample of the young gentleman's incorrigible idleness, that he could not even find something diverting to tell the exile. For Georgiana required so little in the way of entertainment.

'I was diverted by your tale of the footman whom you dismissed for wearing your cravats,' she wrote a week or two later. 'As to servants I believe all families alike are doomed to be annoyed by them. My own damsel whom mamma brought back with us from Bath has already quarrelled with our retirement and pines once more for the delightful smoke and dirt of that city I was so rejoiced to quit. Mamma is feeding her new cow on the finest grass in hopes of having an excellent syllabub and I am very impatient to have you taste it. You cannot doubt the happiness it would give to one from whose thoughts you are never absent.'

Mrs. and Miss Van Cott could not be kept in exile for ever, they returned to town to hear Weber's new opera, *Oberon*.

This expedition to the Opera was an event in Georgiana's life, for, having been hitherto a little uncertain of her taste in music, she found in Weber the music of her dreams. *Der Freischütz* had been ravishing, but *Oberon* had songs which found an echo in her heart. Braham as Huon touched the high water mark of his powers; the opera had a delirious reception from the first night audience, and though the world of fashion held a little aloof, the general public was wild with enthusiasm; the house, crammed to the roof, burst into a frenzy of applause, hats and handkerchiefs were waved in the air, men stood on the benches and shouted themselves hoarse. The overture had to be executed twice and there were many encores. The audience screamed loudly for the composer. Poor Weber was in a state of exhaustion, dying, indeed, but his reception warmed his heart.

The opera was an epic procession, an enchanted panorama, and there was something in the prayer 'Ruler of this awful

hour' which stirred the deepest feelings of a generation brimming with sensibility, both real and affected. Georgiana admired it, but was not sure that she did not prefer that fine song 'Over the dark blue waters', or 'Ocean thou mighty monster'. For her own singing she took the song which suited her best and was in the future, though that, of course, was hidden from her, to fit her even better. The Van Cott's grew quite tired of listening to Georgiana trill about the house:

'Over the dark blue waters,
Over the wide, wide sea,
Fairest of Araby's daughters.
Say, wilt thou sail with me?

Were there no bounds to the waters,
No shore to the wide, wide sea,
Still fearless would Araby's daughter
Sail on through life with thee.'

To her disappointment Arthur did not share her enthusiasm for the new opera, he was so full of disparagement that she only mentioned it to him once.

There was very little with which to fill her prim little letters to him:

'On Tuesday last we were invited to a party at my sister Caroline's where after being regaled with tea and syllabub we were first amused by Miss Brown and Mr. Leon performing on the piano joined by the vocal powers of Mr. L., and then tripped it on the light fantastic toe till near eleven o'clock. Indeed, dear Arthur, I do dote on dancing beyond anything. I trust this does not mean in me a too light and frivolous mind.'

Arthur, meeting her for a brief half-hour, under the firm chaperonage of Mr. Van Cott, reassured her on that score.

Mr. Van Cott, suffering from the gout, turned cantankerous when the young people talked of marriage. He could not part

with his daughter, certainly not to a young man who, however amiable he might be, had all his way to make in the world and was in no hurry to set about it; he told them this, alone and in company; Georgiana wept a little, but Arthur did not seem unduly cast down; his self-assurance made light of difficulty.

Mr. Van Cott tried an antidote to this girlish fancy; he invited a really eligible young gentleman to stay at King's Wimborne.

'Our guest is arrived,' Georgiana wrote to Arthur. 'I think him a nice genteel young man. It is the fashion to call him handsome, but I cannot say he has yet struck me so; no doubt it proceeds from my want of taste. Beauty, in my humble idea, consists more in a pleasing *tout ensemble* than in a set of fine features alone. He is sensibly fond of fox-hunting and manly amusements; in short, I think, a perfect gentleman, but no lady's man. A rival you need never fear in anyone.'

It would not do. She tried to wheedle a consent to marriage at some date in the future from Mr. Van Cott, but, though he loved the child so tenderly that it pained him to deny her anything, he was in the grip of gout and his liver and took the customary view of a prudent papa, which his indulgence seldom allowed him to be. He would not consent to his darling's union with an impecunious young man, and he would not have her prospects spoilt by an indefinite engagement. He told the young man so, plainly at last, but left her mamma to break it to the girl that he would certainly never change his mind on this point. Georgiana wept in her mother's arms, but faced her father squarely, her mind as firm as his. It was terrible, but due, she said, to Arthur, to whom she wrote:

'I have had an interview with papa who tells me that we are still in a situation as precarious, with regard to an income, as ever, which being the case he cannot consent to our union, so essential to our happiness, taking place. I have urged every argument that duty and respect for my father, love and affection for you, could possibly dictate. Alas, all my exertions

have failed as you will find by my papa's answer to your kind letter. I have been very open and serious with my father, and with the greatest candour have assured him no obstacle or power on earth shall make me give you up. There is surely no indelicacy in my now telling you my whole happiness depends on being yours. I must in justice to my beloved father tell you he again repeated his sincere regard for you but, my dearest Arthur, he will not be satisfied with less than £2000 a year. How far there is a possibility of raising that income you best know, but, from what you have yourself written, it appears to me impossible. I hope I do not exceed the bounds of delicacy by declaring the whole truth, but papa seems determined that this shall entirely settle the affair. When I told him it would be impossible totally to resign each other he thought I only talked the language of a lovesick girl. My own heart tells me very different and I am firmly assured my whole happiness depends on a union with you.'

Arthur Quisite thought Mr. Van Cott unreasonable and fussy, indeed insulting, in requiring him to secure an income before he took a wife. Arthur Quisite lived in a different world from the Van Cott's or the Grant's, a world in which wit and ability counted for a great deal. He was a young man who, without a *display* of inordinate vanity thought very well of himself and his prospects. His friends flattered him with brilliant prophecies. What if he had but a beggarly hundred or two! in a time to come, no great distance away either, he would achieve both fortune and fame; 'a second Bulwer', they said in literary drawing-rooms, where his handsome face made a profound impression on 'the Blues'. Besides, and he was too shrewd a young man in that line to forget it, Mr. Van Cott was too tenderly attached to his daughter to let her want, so that she would have income enough if he had none. He saw the many advantages, to him, of the match, and, while writing letters of the strictest propriety to Georgiana, which she might show her father, arranged a secret interview with

her which took her unawares. She was a child still, innocent, untried, completely trusting; his arguments were shrewdly set forth: he persuaded her, at last and with difficulty, to consent to an elopement, since Mr. Van Cott would certainly forgive an accomplished fact; he protested against its imprudence, he would sympathize with its romance. She was impressed, hesitated, and was lost.

On an October evening in 1827 Georgiana followed her mother's example and set out in a coach for Gretna Green, but, less fortunate, was not overtaken. The elopement had been carefully planned; her parents were so sure of the docile child's obedience that her flight was not discovered until it was too late. Mr. Van Cott raged a good deal, and said they should not have a penny of his, but since everyone knew that he adored the girl, it was generally believed that he would relent in time.

Charlotte, who liked young Quisite more than she trusted him, thought of the surest way of bringing him the success which might be the making of him. She took one of her rare looks back into the past, and wrote a letter to Windsor.

Young Arthur Quisite found, to his early astonishment, though presently it appeared no more than his due, that the King took an interest in him

The Van Cotts, as he had anticipated, made the best of what could not be undone, but the young people must at least be married again as respectably as possible and with the least scandal which the circumstances allowed. Georgiana, by her own wish, was married at King's Wimborne and Mr. Van Cott contrived to look as if the wedding gave him pleasure, though his gout, he said, would not allow him to be present at the church. Charlotte held her daughter in her arms for a moment, distressed yet thankful that it was no worse; Arthur, at least, had had the generosity not to harm the child; her runaway marriage had, so far, been no more than an adventure. Georgiana clung to her, but only with the strength of a life-

time's affection, not shrinkingly because of a future darkened by doubt and fear.

At two everyone assembled for luncheon in the great hall of the Manor, and at half-past two the carriages came round, looking very gay with flowers and favours on the harness, in the coachmen's buttonholes and on their whips. Georgiana drove with her mother in the family great coach; she was a little pale and her eyes shone like stars, but she was quite composed. At the Park gates was a great floral arch; there was another at the church gate, and all the children of the village threw flowers before her feet. Georgiana walked to her wedding over a carpet of late roses.

Mr. Quisite was, of course, nervous, and nearly dropped the ring, but it all went off very well.

After the wedding there was the usual feast, the bride cut the cake; there were speeches. Mr. Quisite returned thanks very neatly but in so low a tone that only his immediate neighbours could hear him; Georgiana wanted to comfort him because he seemed so nervous; they were, after all, *her* people and he was a stranger to most of them, and unwelcome to the others; he was, already, her most cherished child.

There was coffee at eight and then the carriage and four was at the door to carry bride and bridegroom away for a honeymoon, and to happiness for ever after, of course. Georgiana, radiant, believed it.

Mr. Van Cott had made no settlements and seemed unrelenting as far as money was concerned, so they took a cottage at Chelsea and Arthur proved that he was right, and that happiness had brought him the inspiration which he lacked before. His novel *The Persian Ambassador* was the outstanding success of 1828, and the Quisites seemed on the highroad to fortune and fame. The only shadow on Georgiana's radiance was caused by the illness of Mr. Van Cott, who had never recovered from the shock of her flight; it had aged and saddened him, and he seemed, suddenly, an old man.

GEORGIANA 1814 - 1846

In the late summer of 1828 he had rallied a little, and the Quisites took the first of those journeys which were to carry Georgiana over all the civilized and half the uncivilized surface of the globe before she died. Though this first was no more than a belated honeymoon trip to Paris.

CHAPTER II

GEORGIANA, of course, saw Paris from an angle very different from Caroline's. Charlotte, who had a weakness for keeping old letters, compared those of her daughters; Caroline had written often, but Georgiana wrote every day:

'Aug. 12th. Here we are safe and sound, having had a very good and quick passage over to Calais, only two and a half hours, seventy or eighty passengers, mostly sick and feeding the fishes, even poor Arthur, almost all indeed except your daughter who turned out to be the best sailor in the world. On landing a very civil Frenchman, filled with admiration for this distinguished performance, pushed our things through the Custom House, body and baggage, the first. We took places on the coach and in three and a half hours arrived at Boulogne, which seems like an English town, the difficulty is to find a French person in it. The ladies swarm in the streets in gayest attire, English servants, English carriages but no English footway. We caught a glimpse of Mr. Brummell at Calais, the great Beau Brummell, I mean. You used to know him, did you not? Remembering your instructions I asked the chambermaid, very pretty, if the bed were dry. She tossed her head and invited me to put my hand into it and feel. As she went out into the corridor a horrid Frenchman with spectacles and a beard came out of the next door and asked the same question adding '*Vous partager mon lit j'espère*'. I closed the door in horror and confusion, but that wretch Arthur was laughing at me and said he was sure the invitation was only to be sure the sheets were dry; he would have done the same. This dreadful pavé has given me a headache, but otherwise I am in the best of health and spirits, my dearest mamma, and my only unfulfilled wish is that you were both here.

'Aug. 14th. The journey to Paris was terrible, rain and thunder all the way and these dreadful pavé roads. The coach was full of vulgar English, all very thin and crabbed and knowing not a word of French, but shouting to make up for their lack of understanding. One Englishwoman was stout with a very red face and she had a nice white silk pelisse for travelling in. We arrived soon after three, very tired. Arthur had reserved rooms at Meurice's and at five we went to the *table d'hôte*, many English, mostly stupid as I fear; some of them, in broad Scots, were talking of "oppening medicines" and sent me off, so that I did not dare to look at Arthur.'

Georgiana, used to travelling in privacy and such luxury as the times afforded, was taking very kindly to the discomforts of travel as a tourist of no rank or wealth; her good humour was imperturbable; Arthur was inclined to be disagreeable and haughty, but Georgiana listened sweetly to her neighbours. The stout lady in the white pelisse was, in spite of Arthur's hauteur, very talkative, and there was something so friendly in her rich Irish voice that Mrs. Quisite could not insist upon her dignity.

'My dear, you should have been here in 1816. There was no comfort, no civility. A *frotteur* conducted me to my apartments, the parquet floor was as chilly as stone, not a scrap of carpet or a rug anywhere. In the *salon* a row of Grenadier chairs along the wall, dingy mirrors and girandoles with glass drops as large as crown pieces. Through the *salon* was a nest of little bedrooms, each with a little camp bed. But, believe me, my dear, there were no *toilettes*. The *frotteur* whom I asked showed me a small delf salad dish and a pint carafe of dirty water set on a commode. How different it all is now. You may not like "old Cochon" but certainly it is more suitable for France to have a King. Look at the traffic in the streets.'

It was, Georgiana thought, terrifying. Royal carriages dashed past with their dull-looking inmates, big omnibuses drove abreast with a great cracking of whips, and velociferes,

cabs and caleshes drew up at garden gates to wait for the English dandies and French *merveilleux* who owned them, and diligences, like the one she was riding in, dashed past with a noise and bustle as terrific as that in Piccadilly, and more alarming, since the postilions shouted in an unknown tongue. But Georgiana was young and eager; the noise might terrify her, but she flung herself wholeheartedly into Paris's outstretched arms.

She kept a journal for her mother:

'The whole day is so occupied in moving about this beautiful, fantastical, enchanting, wretched, elegant, classical, dirty city that I have arisen at half-past six to scribble to you. Last night we went to the Théâtre Français. Oh mamma, never was a place constructed so well for the promotion of iniquity! All that can fascinate the senses and lead them astray is here collected, the gay shops, the bright lights, gambling going on in every corner, the money rattling, the houris walking in the gayest costumes; on the outside, avenues of trees with here and there a light to make enchantment perfect; in these dark walks you may amuse yourself as long, and, I fear, in any way you choose. All Paris seems to me like that, gaiety and iniquity, squalor and splendour all running side by side. The quays are extremely wide and beautiful. On the river are floating baths of enormous extent covered with canvas awnings for ladies and gentlemen. . . .

'We went this evening to the Théâtre des Nouveautés, and saw four little pieces called "Henri Quatre en Famille" founded on an historical anecdote of Henri's domestic amusements, he having been found on the occasion of the English Ambassador's introduction, going on all fours with Henriette de France, his daughter, riding and his sons driving him for horse. Henri, instead of being shocked, asked the Ambassador if he had a family, and on his saying "Yes," said he might then have his game out. Henri Quatre, I think, is the only King the people of France have ever loved . . . On our return through the

Palais Royal we drank iced punch. They give you a goblet of punch, a bottle of iced water and cakes for a franc - tenpence. The water iced into a solid body in the bottle. The consumption must be enormous as these places seem to be occupied by ladies and gentlemen in parties. There are no less than a thousand of these cafés in Paris, at which almost all persons dine, which must certainly relieve the ladies' domestic troubles. The wives ears need never be afflicted as yours are (I hope papa will forgive me) with "What will there be for dinner, my love?" The bad cookery, England's tough beef and such calamities never cause dissension. Arthur assures me, however, that these appearances deceive. When the excitement of novelty is passed there is an aching void within which can only be filled by the domestic habits that form the peculiarities and happiness of our English character . . .

'Aug. 16th. We have been to visit the palace of Versailles. Its magnificent size exceeded my most enlarged ideas. We saw the Little Trianon and I thought of the poor Queen so much that I almost seemed to see her figure flitting in and out among the trees. Arthur said that I was suffering from the sun which caused illusions. Certainly it was very hot, but, indeed, mamma, it was very odd, the distinctness with which I saw the Queen. I could have put out a hand and taken hers, and certainly she smiled at me . . .

'Aug. 17th. To-day we saw the cast of an enormous elephant which stands on a part of the site of the Bastille. It was intended by Napoleon as a fountain and reservoir for water passing through its enormous trunk, and thence to supply to the numerous adjacent founts in different parts of the town the water for the consumption of the people. Arthur is very amused at the praises bestowed on this fountain, and says he regrets the ridiculousness of people, travelling for what they call information and totally ignorant of the better arrangements of their own country, where each house is so fully supplied with the essential requisites of cleanliness at the average rate of a

halfpenny a day for each house. If English people were driven to fountains for their water I apprehend they would soon lose their character for cleanliness and be as dirty as their neighbours. In the Jardin des Plantes we saw the Giraffe which is so much *à la mode* that they have a new style of hairdressing called *à la giraffe*. She is a lady so gentle, so peculiar, so elegant, 16 feet high at three years old. I had no idea, mamma, there was so curious a creature in the world; she is certainly a novelty which all the world flocks to see . . .

'At the opera we heard *Masaniello* a representation of the insurrection of the Lazzaroni at Naples. It was not, I thought, very well performed. Arthur, much against his conscience, yielded to my importunities and took me to Frescati, an elegant gambling house for ladies, and there were ladies indeed, staking their silver and gold at roulette, rouge et noir and French hazard. He would not, of course, permit me to lay any stake . . .

'Aug. 18th. We walked to the Vauxhall of Paris to-night although it was Sunday. Indeed it is impossible to see a distinction between Sunday and week days here except that greater gaiety is going on, shops are open, houses building, roads repairing, husbandry progressing and all in pursuit of one object - pleasure. A sour-tempered Frenchman said to Arthur that he sometimes doubted if there had been a revolution at all. But their gaiety, it appears to me, mamma, is conducted with great propriety. They do not, like our people, indulge in those horrid incentives to riot, gin and spirits, they seem to drink nothing but iced fruit drinks, they dance and have great fireworks, jugglers, songs, etc., but no disorder . . .

'We have been visiting palaces, Fontainebleau and St. Cloud. Exquisite as may be the taste of our sovereign it appears puerile and insignificant when compared to the gigantic efforts in architecture and classical buildings of the Kings of France, and indeed of private gentlemen's houses. Their taste, I fear, is very much more polished than ours. Nothing

can be more agreeable to a stranger than the extreme vivacity of even the lowest Frenchman. As to their morals, the difference, Arthur says, is more their misfortune than their fault.'

Paris delighted Georgiana as much – though she showed it more sedately – as it had delighted Caroline more than ten years before. She saw it, of course, from the angle of a comparatively poor person, and it was, besides, a Paris much changed from the post-war city of celebrations, which it had been on Lady Grant's honeymoon, but it still offered the most delectable diversions; Grisi sang, and there was a new opera *Le Nozze di Lammermuir*, and, as Mr. Praed sang:

'The cool café, the cabriolet,
Cigars and macaronis,
And rouge et noir, and eau sucré,
And conversaziones.'

Georgiana was, to all appearance, radiantly happy, and when she and Arthur returned from their honeymoon they found themselves forgiven. Mr. Van Cott set them up in a house in Lowndes Square, which was growing modish, and was the first visitor to dine at their board.

It was his last excursion; a week later his wife found him dead, sitting upright in his chair as if he were asleep. After making ample provision for Charlotte he had left the rest of his property, with her as trustee during her lifetime, to be divided equally between his daughters.

Georgiana was to be wealthy; she might live where she pleased, but she liked the house in Lowndes Square, to which she insisted on bringing her mother for a long visit; they were happy to be together again, and quizzed the passers-by from the tall windows.

One of Georgiana's neighbours was that rattle, Lady Morgan, who drove out with the short-sighted Sir Charles in an equipage which was the joke of the neighbourhood; very high it was and springy, like a grasshopper in shape and colour,

with enormous wheels, so that it was difficult to get in, and almost impossible to get out. Sir Charles wore large green spectacles and drove as it pleased God, the tall Irish footman for ever jumping down to see whom Sir Charles had knocked down or run over. The horse was, mercifully, too small for the vehicle and very quiet so that less damage was done than might have been expected, but it was a constant diversion to watch Sir Charles in his fur-trimmed, much braided great coat, and Lady Morgan in her enormous bonnet and cloak lined with fur which trailed over the back of the carriage. A very curious person was Lady Morgan! Georgiana's young visitors always rushed in great excitement to the windows to see her and Sir Charles set out.

They lived most of the year in Lowndes Square, for Arthur's sake, with an occasional visit to King's Wimborne for Georgiana's. Mrs. Van Cott bought them a house in Brighton to which Caroline, too, came frequently, with the odd assortment of children which she had collected, Tim Grant, almost a young man now, her own boy Jeremy, and two little girls who appeared to be poor relations of Sir Timothy, no one seemed to know in what degree. They all spent the greater part of the summer months in the house on the old Steine, near Pegge's Royal Hotel, with a wide view of the sea and a constantly moving procession of Brighton's very odd population visible from the windows to divert Charlotte's still satirical eyes.

Brighton had lost a little of its raffish air, for George IV was dead and the family parties, which had been driven away from the pretty little village of Brighthelmstone when he made his headquarters there half a century before, were returning to give the children the benefit of its quite wonderful air. It was still popular with the Court, but Queen Adelaide had restored decorum.

Georgiana was not well and the children had some youthful ailment; they went to see Sir Watkin Waller, who had been one of George IV's physicians and who lived in one of the

minarets of the astonishing Pavilion. The children were entranced by him; he had a fully bewigged and bepowdered head which seemed to them most divertingly old-fashioned, very odd, and, when he wagged it, a little alarming. He was charming with the young people, but he looked at Georgiana most oddly, and made her uncomfortable with his close scrutiny and knowing air. That old tale! ~~She~~ He seldom thought of it unless some elderly beau carried a secret lewdness in his glance or Arthur sought to make capital out of it, as he sometimes did, to hurt and shame her. 'The Regent's daughter,' she would overhear the whisper and feel ashamed for him and for herself, but helpless, since he would not heed entreaties to let the story die. Sir Watkin Waller had been talking to Arthur, and was more interested in her than in her health.

She was in haste to leave the Pavilion when she found the physician in this mood, but King William came up in his friendly way and talked to Georgiana, and the children, when they reached home, mimicked his abrupt 'Exactly so, ma'am, exactly so,' but thought him a kind old gentleman.

The Queen, too, was very gracious to Georgiana, but when Miss Angela Burdett drove by with the old Duchess of St. Albans tongues wagged because Queen Adelaide had refused to receive her.

Marie Félicie Malibran was singing at Brighton that summer and delighted them all, when they went to hear her.

'Her fee is only thirty guineas, my dear. Compare it with Paganini's, who expects fifty.'

The children thought he was worth the difference, for he had a most fascinating way of playing a whole concerto on a single string. Behind their restless little heads the gossips whispered:

'My love, you know how he acquired that accomplishment? He assassinated one of his mistresses and was condemned to five years' imprisonment. He was allowed his violin to solace him, but with only one string, lest he should hang himself with the others; a diverting story is it not?'

Mrs. Quisite was greatly benefited by the sea air; she was, indeed, very well when she returned to London in September and took up her quarters in the house in Berkeley Square in which she had been born. But she suffered terribly when her child was born. The physicians saved its life with difficulty,—they would not have succeeded without her mother's devotion and good sense—and told ~~her~~ that she would never have another. Arthur was quite hysterical, 'as if he had to endure the sufferings', said Mrs. Van Cott drily.

Georgiana gave her mother an odd, swift look. Charlotte grew thoughtful. So the poor child had found him out, had she? Mr. Van Cott had always prophesied that she would, but she had put so cheerful a face upon her disillusionment that until that glance of revelation her mother had not been sure; in her pain and weakness the mask had slipped, and her desperate unhappiness had stood revealed. Her recovery was so slow that it grew apparent that she made no effort; her misery had vanquished her weakness and swept over her, so that she felt she would be glad to die; she was too languid to do anything but lie and think, and thinking was of all things the most fatal to recovery.

How long had her happiness lasted? Had it even survived the honeymoon? Only by her own firm determination to see nothing amiss. With her perpetual 'Dear Arthur says this,' and 'Dear Arthur thinks that'; with her hand under his arm and a bright smile for him even when she was dropping with fatigue, she had concealed from herself and others his monstrous egotism and selfishness. He was vain and stupid and cruel, and she had no use in his eyes but to see to his comfort and offer incense on the altar of his vanity. His youth and the physical charm which she had had for him had partially disguised it, at least to her inexperienced eyes, for, as her mother recognized with sadness, the love and care lavished on the girl, the lack of any shadow of unhappiness in her home, had left her entirely defenceless. Caroline, naive as she had been, was better

equipped, more pliant, and far more skilful in handling situations; indeed, Caroline's sensibility was no more than an amusing affectation which dropped from her when she left the fashionable world, and revealed her core of sound good sense, but sensibility was engrained in Georgiana; the process of hardening, so that she should not feel the lacerating winds of disillusionment, would be long and bitter, perhaps disastrous, though Charlotte hoped much from the girl's fundamental common sense, which had been overlaid with layer upon layer of sentimentality.

Mrs. Van Cott, sitting in her daughter's bedroom with her embroidery upon her lap, thought a good deal about the past and a little about the present as she sorted her silks. This age, to which Georgiana appeared to belong temperamentally as well as in years, filled her with astonishment and some contempt; it was such a curiously credulous one, turning its back on the eighteenth-century scepticism so determinedly, and reviving medieval ideals in which it affected an almost breathless belief. The Gothic revival and the romantic realism in literature would have made the eighteenth century laugh consumedly, she thought. This was a generation which seemed to *pride* itself on not being, like its predecessor, an age of common sense; it lacked the sturdy spirit of self-reliance and confidence in its own good judgment, it was eager to believe anything as long as it was sufficiently emotional or strange. She recalled the odd mysticism of the Emperor Alexander, who must consult a seeress, a charlatan, of course, before he could arbitrate upon the destinies of the world which he had rescued from Napoleon, forgetting that simple creature Wellington. She and Mr. Van Cott had thought it laughable and had thanked God, the God in whom they did not believe, for Metternich's common sense. But there was, it appeared, no more common sense in ordinary life than there was in politics; every woman was *larmoyante*, and every man seemed murmuring '*Weltschmerz*'.

She moved impatiently in her high-backed chair. Georgiana's tired lids lifted.

'Do you think, my dear,' Mrs. Van Cott asked significantly, 'that you could endure a few pages from *Candide*?'

Georgiana understood her perfectly, and gave the ghost of a laugh.

'I was thinking, mamma, of a course of Mrs. Somerville, but in the meantime by all means let us have lessons from *Candide*. "*Il faut cultiver notre jardin*".'

Mrs. Van Cott was vastly relieved; the poor child did not intend to be beaten, but to face life with philosophy and a little tonic cynicism.

CHAPTER III

THE little Emily flourished, and early in the New Year Georgiana was about again, apparently fully restored to health. She had lost her appearance of extreme youth and that remarkable gentleness and tranquillity which had been, in Mr. Van Cott's eyes, at least, her greatest charm; she had, to her mother's relief, the appearance of a woman who was sure of herself and mistress of a situation which presented difficulties, but not insuperable ones. She had faced and conquered her trouble, found some consolation for disillusionment, and assumed a smiling face for the world. It was the tradition of her caste – to keep up appearances, to pretend that everything was all right, to put a brave front on any business, however bad it might appear. It was, Charlotte thought, a good way, as well as the courageous one; nothing was to be gained by sitting down to discuss the details of one's misery with other people, even with one's dearest; it was useless; it was painful, dull for others and uncommonly weakening for oneself. Georgiana declined to be *larmoyante* in public, and, if she wept in private, no one was aware of it; she mapped out a life of her own and learned to handle Arthur's so that he should cause her the least possible amount of trouble and shame. She could not cure him of vanity, or egotism, or indolence, but she could cease to feed them, and refuse to allow them to swallow either herself or her child.

Charlotte looked on admiringly as she fought her battle without giving confidences or asking help, and Caroline, so observant and shrewd under her cloak of volatility, gave her the best possible help in the most, apparently, irresponsible way; all her collection of assorted children were deposited for the greater part of the year in the big house in Berkeley Square

which belonged to Charlotte but which was, she said, to come to Georgiana on her death, so that she might just as well take possession of it now.

Georgiana accepted gratefully; Arthur had married her for her inheritance, but as long as most of it was still in her mother's gift he would not be able to handle it and so must behave in such a manner that Mrs. Van Cott would not alienate her younger daughter's share. They lived in superficial harmony, and saw as little of each other as their different ways allowed.

It was an interesting epoch, Mrs. Van Cott told her daughter; and Georgiana began to observe it for herself. No one had supposed that George IV's death and William's succession would make any great difference, merely the substitution of one elderly gentleman, who was a jest, for another who had been a scandal, but King Billy the Tar had not been six weeks on his throne before it was realized that the difference was very great indeed; George had opposed all reform, William was rather in favour of it, helpful, rather than obstructive; the dam was removed; the great river might rush down to the sea.

The age of mechanical progress and Reform had arrived; the middle class was in the saddle, though not at all sure of the way to manage the steed, and the days of privilege were numbered. That objectionable monster the locomotive was really carrying its tail of smoke and brimstone over the green country, having killed poor Mr. Huskisson, who had forgotten it was not as obliging as a horse, and who served as well as another for the human sacrifice necessary to propitiate the new god. There was the omnibus, too, a queer contrivance, quite unsuitable for the conveyance of ladies, of course, but likely to make a great change in the habits of Londoners.

Mrs. Van Cott took an enormous interest in these mechanical novelties, as she did in everything else, for that matter; it sometimes seemed as if a double allowance of energy had been given her in her old age to make up for her listless middle years. The great figures of her youth were vanishing; Goethe was dead, and

Weber, and Sir Walter Scott was passing, but new ones were climbing up – young Bulwer was writing amusing novels, *Pelham* was as diverting as anything she remembered since Mr. Sheridan's *bon mots*, Mademoiselle Mars was at Covent Garden, and there was a new opera called *Rosamunde*.

Georgiana, who did not share all her mother's enthusiasms, was as interested as she was in the new French literature, of which Caroline sent home very racy accounts; there were Monsieur Hugo's romantic plays and George Sand's subversive novels. Georgiana was inclined to despise novels; that, of course, was Arthur's fault, for he, and the other young men and women who wrote them, and who looked up to him as genius and leader, seemed to her full of affectations and small vanities; she much preferred more serious, even heavy, reading, problems upon which her mind might bite.

She had, however, little time for such reading, for her house seemed always full of children, and she found the outer world reflected for her in their minds. They were very lively and active and took an enormous interest in this brave new world in which they lived. The boys had sporting tastes, but the girls were very musical; they knew all the airs from *Fidelio*, *Robert le Diable*, *Don Giovanni*, and could dance the famous Gavotte; they sang that sparkling French ditty, 'Les Compliments de Normandie', as well as such English ballads as 'My Mother bids me bind my hair', and 'She wore a wreath of roses'. They played the pianoforte interminably, and were always clamouring to be taken to the Opera or the play. When they were not occupied with music they were always deep in the novels which Mrs. Quisite despised, or hanging out of the windows to see as much of the world as was visible from them, or walking abroad to catch glimpses of the interesting or the great. Arthur Quisite's literary friends were viewed by critical little faces hanging over the banisters as they mounted the stairs of the Berkeley Square house; young Mr. Disraeli wore the most exciting clothes, Count D'Orsay had a romantic air about him, and so,

Emily said, had Prince Louis Napoleon. The others did not agree with her, and so the child obstinately persisted in building a pedestal on which that strange young man was to stand in her little mind. He had caused something of a flutter by his insistence on his imperial blood; his acquaintance flattered Arthur Quisite's vanity, but few people found him interesting. He was short and slight, and had an ungraceful way of standing; his complexion was pale yet swarthy, his cheeks clean shaven, but he wore a thick moustache and what was to be known as an 'imperial'. He was very much of a dandy and wore a green satin stock held in place by a breastpin in the form of an eagle in gold surrounded by brilliants. It was that breastpin which fascinated Emily; she piped in her childish treble a song which she had learned from her Aunt Caroline:

On parlera de sa gloire
Sous la chaume bien longtemps;
L'humble toit, dans cinquante ans, ne
Ne connaîtra plus d'autre histoire

Il avait petit chapeau
Avec redingote grise,
Pres de lui je me troublai;
Il me dit 'Bonjour ma chère.
Bonjour ma chère'.
'Il vous a parlé, grand'mere?
Il vous a parlé?'

The Napoleons, uncle and nephew, had an irresistible fascination for Emily. The other children jeered at her, and bragged of Wellington's superiority to the Emperor. The Duke, of course, was a familiar figure; there was only one Duke. They met him sometimes in the Park, dressed in his well polished, well blocked hat with its narrow brim, his single breasted blue surtout, white cravat without a bow, fastened behind by a silver buckle, white waistcoat and white trousers, which he

LOUIS NAPOLEON AT STRASBURG 1836

wore winter and summer, the trousers strapped tightly over varnished boots; he was as much of a dandy in his austere fashion as Mr. Disraeli was in his flashy one. The Grant children, who knew him well, had a tremendous admiration for the Duke.

For a moment, in 1836, however, the children all shared Emily's interest in Prince Louis Napoleon, who had made the world draw a deep breath, and then shout with laughter, by slipping into a barrack square at Strasburg one October morning and announcing that he was Napoleon the Third. He spent that night in jail, and the flutter was soon forgotten, except by one precocious little girl who, for some unaccountable reason, regarded him as a romantic person, rather than a fool.

The other children were far more excited by other news from France, and stood, shivering with delicious terror, in front of the window of an artists' colourman, named Barbe, who exhibited a waxwork of the would-be regicide, Fieschi, enveloped in blood-stained bandages. They loved such gory exhibits.

Aunt Caroline, who had the same zest for life as they had, took them to a huge building called the Colosseum, in Regent's Park, where there was being exhibited a gigantic panorama of London, planned by Mr. Horner and painted by Pariss. There was also a Hall of Mirrors, a Gothic Aviary, a grotto, and sham ruins, and a great ascending room which held from thirty to forty spectators and was, as Emily would tell her grandchildren, undoubtedly the grandparent of lifts. Then there was the operatic burletta, *The Waterman*, and a new ditty which was running like wild fire through the town: 'The Bonny English Rose'. There was a troupe of Bedouin Arab acrobats who stood on each other's heads and tied themselves into knots and vaulted and tumbled in a way which seemed supernatural to the children.

They returned home worn out with excitement, and Mrs. Van Cott said drily that she thought children nowadays had too much attention paid to them, and that it would certainly

turn out a mistake in the long run; her daughters laughed at her and pointed out to her how indulgent she had been to them.

'Yes, but not in public,' she persisted. 'And it was certainly a good rule to keep children in the background.'

England that year was in the throes of Bozomania; the children caught it as badly as the rest of the reading world.

'Nearly a fortnight till the next number of *Pickwick*,' Emily sighed, and the others echoed her regrets.

Emily re-christened the cat 'Mrs. Bardell', and the surviving members of 'Mrs. Bardell's' family received the names of Sam Weller and Sergeant Buzfuz. They played at Dickens for years, and Emily dramatized the novels, always insisting on the heroine's part for herself, but a heroine more spirited than any Mr. Dickens imagined; Nancy did not take at all kindly to murder at the hands of Jeremy as Bill Sikes. For *Oliver Twist* they found even more to their liking than Mr. Pickwick. The Queen, too, they learned, was reading it, but not with complete approval, for 'It's all among workhouses and coffin-makers and pickpockets,' she said. Lord Melbourne did not approve of its tone.

That, of course, was when 'Oliver' was quite an old story, and they were reading it for about the twentieth time. No one had been more excited than the inhabitants of the house in Berkeley Square at the accession of the Queen. The younger members were delighted at the prospect of an era which promised to be so completely new, but their elders were a little regretful, Georgiana even wept for King William, who had been extremely kind to her.

Emily had at first been inclined to side with her mother, but when Jeremy shouted 'Three cheers for the Queen,' he carried his little cousin's enthusiasm trailing after him, for Emily adored Jeremy even more than she did his half-brother Tim.

Jeremy was a handsome boy, if a little lacking in the manliness which Georgiana admired. He was as great a dandy as

his father, and prided himself on being the mirror of fashion when he followed his Uncle Arthur up the steps of Gore House attired in a maroon tail coat lined with white silk and ornamented with gilt buttons, a prodigious jabot of Brussels lace, a crimson velvet waistcoat, two under waistcoats, one of green watered silk and the other of white kerseymere, a high stock of black satin with a double breastpin, joined by a little chain of gold, tightly fitting pantaloons of mouse colour with two rows of little mother-of-pearl buttons at the ankles, speckled silk socks and varnished pumps with broad bows of black ribbon, and his hair very tightly curled.

Emily had been speechless at the sight of this splendour, and a little nervous when she saw a commonplace version of her Jeremy next day, but he had not, to her great relief, been spoilt by his excursion into the grown-up world, and still condescended to play with her.

They all loved bloodthirsty amusements, and varied Dickens games with a particular gory version of the horrid crime of James Greenacre who, at Christmas time in 1837, had murdered and mutilated the unfortunate Hannah Brown. Poor Hannah's body was found in an empty house, her limbs turned up in different parts of London, her head was found in the lock of one of the canals. The murderer had travelled in an omnibus with the head in a canvas bag upon his knee, and there was a story that he handed his fare to the conductor saying:

'By rights I ought to pay for two passengers.'

For three months all London was convulsed by the Greenacre fever.

'Oh Jimmy Greenacre
You shouldn't have done it, Greenacre,
You knocked her head in with a rolling-pin
You wicked Jimmy Greenacre!'

chanted Emily. It made a wonderful game; one of the best they ever had.

Mr. Bulwer Lytton, papa's friend, wrote those thrilling tales *Eugene Aram* and *Paul Clifford*, which provided singularly fine subjects for nursery drama. Mr. Thackeray parodied blood-thirsty tales in his *Catherine* and out-thrilled the thrillers, and, of course, there was Mr. Harrison Ainsworth, whom they knew very well and approved over the banisters when he came to drink tea. His *Jack Sheppard* was very satisfactory; Emily never lacked material for her dramas.

In spite of its master's vagaries, which affected all their spirits on occasions, the household in Berkeley Square was, on the whole, a very happy one, until Emily's tenth year; then, at one blow, all happiness seemed ended.

Charlotte had been ailing for some time, but she pooh-poohed her daughter's talk of doctors; like most eighteenth-century women of fashion she despised the class. She had long suspected that she had a cancer and at last was sure of it; her one thought was to hide the fact from Georgiana as long as she could. The time came when concealment was no longer possible from such loving and observant eyes; she might set her teeth and keep a face wooden in its impassivity, but she could not prevent the beads of sweat from forming on her brow. She owned at last that she felt ill, and, since the sick are poor company for the hale, would be better alone in her chamber. She sat there in her high-backed chair, her face in shadow in the dim-lit room and gently put aside her daughter's solicitude.

'It is nothing very much. I am growing old, Georgiana, and must expect some ailments. In the spring I shall be well again.'

Anxious and but half convinced Georgiana attempted no argument. The house was quieter than it had been, the children more abroad, and hushed a little when at home. A golden October faded at last into the first days of a typical November. The day before her birthday Georgiana sent the young people out walking with Emily's governess and took her embroidery up to her mother's room. The short afternoon was



GEORGIANA'S WALKING COSTUMF CAME FROM VIENNA

[*Wiener Zeitschrift* 1825]

flecked with pale sunshine, but as dusk fell a few wisps of fog drifted into the Square. Georgiana rose to draw the curtains herself rather than summon a disturbing maid.

'Leave them, my child,' Mrs. Van Cott said quietly in a rather breathless tone. 'Too soon it will be night.'

Georgiana stood at the window looking out into the darkening square. The house was deeply quiet; somewhere a pleasant voice was singing an elusive tune, which seemed familiar though she could not place it.

She turned to glance at her mother, a question on her lips. Mrs. Van Cott was sitting very straight in her high-backed chair, listening intently, with parted lips and an eager look on her face; afraid that her daughter would speak and break the spell, she lifted a warning finger.

'Ssh. Do you hear it, Georgiana?'

'Hear what, mamma?'

'O Richard, o mon roi.'

No wonder that the air had seemed familiar. The singer was coming nearer. Odd, but it really seemed as if he were in the house, though the thought was absurd since there were only servants; yet it seemed as if light footsteps were coming up the stairs. Mrs. Van Cott turned towards the door expectantly; softly Georgiana crossed to open it.

There was no one there, of course. As she shut it quietly she heard her mother murmur, 'I am coming, André.'

The footsteps paused, and then went up the stairs into silence. In swift alarm Georgiana ran to her mother, but Charlotte had joined the singer.

She had died like a good eighteenth-century lady of quality, without sentimental leave takings or the consolations of religion. Fully aware that her days were numbered she had kept her own counsel and stood very bravely facing the dark, believing in nothing and without fear, free from the modern softness which she despised, and which was seeping into everything, so that one could find no hard outlines, nothing solid or real; she had

GEORGIANA 1814 - 1846

found little to admire in the new age, the restless, sentimental, amorphous nineteenth century which seemed to her to delight in blinking all unpleasant facts and exchanging reality for humbug.

She had not believed in a life beyond the grave as she bravely faced her painful end, and yet, at the last, an odd fantasy had carried her into the dark hand in hand with her young lover.

CHAPTER IV

CAROLINE rushed over from Paris and whisked all the children, including Emily, away with her. Georgiana was left in the sad and silent house with no company but her husband's, a situation which, with great skill, she had avoided for some years. Touched for a moment by the shock of her mother's death he had attempted sympathy. Shrinking a little from his touch she had contrived to appear passive, but responsiveness had been beyond her strength; too well she knew the situation which would soon arise, for, the protection of her mother's existence once removed, there would no longer be any barrier between Arthur and his greed. A half share of Mr. Van Cott's considerable wealth was now her absolute property, and that, of course, meant Arthur's. Only a year or two before they had had a devastating quarrel over Caroline Norton, whose husband seemed to Georgiana to be Arthur's twin; a woman had no rights, they argued, either in her children or her fortune; she, her money, and her children were the absolute property of her husband to do what he chose with, chattels with no hope of comfort but in their lord's generosity and clemency. His daughter need expect no more consideration than her mother; she was his property, too, to be married off as he saw fit, with a dowry whose amount would depend entirely on his whim. Sir Timothy, acting for Caroline, could harass him by delays, but could not cancel his caprices.

Arthur had not liked Mrs. Van Cott, but he put on an appearance of some sorrow.

'My love, we only recognize our blessings when we have lost them,' he said sententiously to his silent wife, and recommended, for himself, his remedy for all ills, a tumbler of hot brandy negus.

His kinder mood lasted for an even shorter period than his wife had expected. Within a week he was attacking her with spiteful rage for her kindness to a young protégée, something of a handful, whose mother was living in the south of France.

'A disreputable person,' Arthur stormed. 'I will not have you dealing with her.'

'A most amiable and unfortunate woman, Mrs. Buller says,' Georgiana retorted. 'But Mrs. Buller reads George Sand, like me.'

'A woman parted from her husband disgracefully. I will not have it. Do you understand me?'

'Oh, completely. Am I to accompany you on this visit to Mrs. Aixly?'

Arthur looked at her sharply. Was gossip busy? Had she heard anything, that she used that tone? Mrs. Aixly's husband, with more justification than Mr. Norton, had been talking of bringing an action for crim. con. Georgiana's money was a very timely gift from Heaven to buy his silence.

Very little of the situation was lost on Mrs. Quisite, but she looked on with satirical silence for the three days of the visit, repaying Mrs. Aixly's chilly civility with coin from the same mint. She could not endure that kind of atmosphere, however, for any length of time.

'When are we to go home?' she asked, being very weary of watching rapturous young ladies make a fool of her husband.

'Oh, Saturday if you like.' He realized that her patience had its limits.

'I *do* like, Arthur.'

But she knew that it would not be as easy as all that; he had evidently been piqued by some trifle, a momentary irritation which a lavish offering of incense would disperse; he had not yet quarrelled with his surroundings, had done nothing yet in the house but throw it into a hubbub with his irregularities, a process which the women seemed to find less trying than his wife did, no doubt because they had less of it. Perhaps a week

would see the end of it, though she foresaw great pressing on the part of his hostess and great indecision on his, which would throw the odium of a definite decision on her; her usual part, in fact, to get him out of a scrape and shoulder her role as 'the odious wife of that charming Mr. Quisite'.

She seldom accompanied him on such visits; the company he kept was, he explained elaborately, quite *comme il faut* for a gentleman, but unsuitable for her; she was, for once, in complete agreement with him, though ironically and for quite different reasons. She liked quiet people and unaffected problems; though she had some very civil acquaintances among the Blues who gushed over Arthur, her real friends were such as Mary Somerville and Jane Carlyle. Arthur preened himself with other birds of bright plumage in the gorgeous surroundings of Gore House. Of course no ladies, in the stricter sense, ever went there, but there was, she gathered, no lack of charming, fresh young beauties with their hair parted demurely in the middle, their ringlets hanging to their shoulders, eddying round Mr. Quisite, with their incense burners held out a little stiffly in white fingers above their voluminous skirts and billowing crinolines. *They* did not find Arthur Quisite absurd, as his wife did, because he must be always aping someone else instead of making the best of his mediocre self. He had always been something of a dandy; now, though he was growing fat, he must follow in the footsteps of Count D'Orsay, who might look very well in a blue satin cravat, blue velvet waistcoat, cream coloured coat lined with velvet of the same hue, trousers also of a bright colour, white French gloves, two gorgeous breast-pins, and length enough of gold watch chain to have hanged himself in. That sort of thing did not suit Arthur, but he would wear it, since Count D'Orsay did.

He had had no great literary success since that second novel of his, but his bookseller was a genius at puffs, and Arthur was certainly possessed of good looks and had plenty of money, his wife's, to fling about; he was undoubtedly popular in many

places, chiefly where there were romantic twittering young girls to swing the censor.

During his frequent absences he had, of course, no opportunity of writing to relieve any anxiety she might feel, but on his return there would be a fine deluge of autobiography to which she must listen patiently until he tired of it.

When her own house was full of his admirers she kept her own room a good deal and always had her breakfast there, in a hopeless reaction against the extravagant homage which he was used to receive from his acquaintance and which she could not face so early in the day, before she had time to adjust her armour of ironical detachment. She had no illusions about him, knew him to be tinsel, yet, sometimes, still, he charmed her, as he always *could* charm her when he set himself to it, by a jest of the right kind at the right moment; then, when she found herself laughing with him, all hostility melted and she owned that Arthur, when he liked, was the most agreeable person in the world; she forgot, then, that even his charm for her was calculating, never spontaneous, and that, unfortunately, it was seldom worth his while to be charming to her, or to her friends, or, more particularly, to Caroline.

Arthur liked Caroline well enough, but not as a visitor; he disliked all visitors who came for the company of his wife; he grew restive when he could not have all her attention, fidgeted, produced schemes for changing the furniture, which must engage her, would have all the pictures re-hung, the furniture upholstered. When they were alone he seldom entered her sitting-room, but when Caroline was there he seemed unable to keep out of it, and the longer he spent in it the more dissatisfied he grew at the way it was arranged.

He was particularly tiresome during the first visit which Caroline paid after Mrs. Van Cott's death; it seemed to Georgiana that she never had one hour alone with her sister. Everything in the house had been altered at least twice, and, when they thought at last that they were rid of him he brought

a picture from his own room, a terrible daub of 'The Last Judgment' of which his wife had more than once expressed her detestation, and would hang it over her mantelpiece in spite of her protests. It would, she thought, destroy her privacy for ever, for she would never feel alone as long as that picture hung in her room. She almost screamed with irritation, but checked herself, for she knew very well that a passionate resistance would clinch the matter; tact, painfully grasped, was her only hope.

'I think it will not be seen to advantage in so small a room,' she said evenly.

'Oh, Arthur, I think this room is too dark to reveal its fine colouring,' Caroline nobly supported her.

He considered it, and after an interval acknowledged that they might be right. He carried away the daub at last and Georgiana heaved a sigh of relief that was not far from tears. Caroline, giving her time to recover herself, produced a letter.

'Miss Hengist has come into her grandfather's fortune at last,' she remarked.

'What will she do with all her money?' Georgiana was calmer.

'Give her stepmother a velvet gown and a diamond ring for a marriage portion,' laughed Caroline.

'I wish you would suggest to her to found a little feminine La Trappe,' said Georgiana, 'to which females of an earnest turn of mind might retire from time to time to consider what they want to do. To attain some glimmer of an idea as to that would be an immense help.'

'An impossible one amid the deluge of babble in which most of us spend our time,' Caroline acknowledged, but seemed very cheerful under this affliction.

Georgiana sighed, 'God help us poor women, especially such of us as have not our daily bread to work for or a regiment of small children to bring up.'

'La, Georgiana, why cannot you cultivate a mind like a lily

of the field and put away all little cares. There are so many diversions; *il faut cultiver notre jardin*, as I think I have heard you quote.'

'I have a mind too active for my circumstances, Caroline.'

'No one is more unsuited to be the mirror of the great man,' Caroline acknowledged.

'Ah, if it were real greatness!'

This was disloyalty, a confidence which slipped out unawares; Georgiana would have recalled her words but knew it would be useless with her sister. She hastened to give the subject another twist.

'I have, if you please, undergone the process of animal magnetism to cure me of my discontents, but I have, I fear, and as the Professor reproached me, an ill-regulated mind, as impractical as the Rock of Gibraltar.'

Caroline would not be deflected. 'You brood too much, Georgiana.'

'Perhaps I do. How I envy people who have the gift of putting all they think and feel into words. I might, my dear, set up for a novelist.'

It was unlikely, but she found some pleasure in the company of those *she* called great men, who were not Arthur's. She had a great admiration for such odd creatures as scientists and mathematicians; she read substantial volumes devoted to astronomy, and was both interested and excited by Sir William Drummond's *Œdipus Judæus*, in which he explained the Old Testament stories as astronomical allegories.

'A profane book,' said Arthur severely. 'He dare not publish it for fear of clerical hysterics.'

Mrs. Quisite's tastes, however, were varied; she went to hear Mr. Carlyle lecture on 'Heroes', totally disagreeing with him as to what a hero was, and discovered a new poet of a most unusual kind who had written a thing called 'Sordello' which no one seemed able to understand.

At Mrs. Carlyle's she made the acquaintance of some of the

men whose work she admired; sharing the children's delight in *Pickwick*, she was as excited as Emily herself when she was introduced to Mr. Dickens. Arthur professed to despise all these new men, except Bulwer and Disraeli, whom he admired perhaps, because, not wholly successfully, they aimed to be dandies like himself.

His pettiness increased as these new stars swam into their firmament; he was like a child in his small jealousies, and she both his guardian and his servant, a slave to his least caprice. He could not sleep; she must be disturbed to share his vigil with him. He wanted a book; she must secure it for him, and at once, since on its possession he seemed to have hung all his hopes for this world and the next. She trudged through half London, found it at last, and returned to find he had forgotten it, and was quite demoralized at the prospect of a dinner at the Macreadys', who were quite out of his line. Tired as she was she must see him into his clothes, polish him with a clothes brush, arrange his stock and sit patiently while he groaned out his distaste for the dinner, lounging about from the table to the fireplace, fidgeting with everything and contradicting everything she said. He was safe in his cab at last and then she had only to sit up for him, ready to brew his brandy negus lest he rouse the whole house with a storm because it was not hot. He returned at one in the morning, all smiles, quite pleased with his luck. They had made much of him; Dickens had been there and Carlyle, Dr. Quin and the Butlers, Mr. Longfellow from America, and a great many women, Mrs. Dickens for one, and afterwards there was a *soirée* and Miss Hotson sang them all into bliss.

'You should go out more,' Arthur turned on his wife resentfully. 'They will think I keep you like a slave.'

'Emily was not well, Arthur. I explained that I could not leave a sick child.'

His jealousy of the child burst into flames in a moment. He turned irritably to his desk; there was a pamphlet he must have

before he went to bed; he must work a little, for certainly he would not sleep.

'A small pamphlet,' he said working himself into one of his restless unreasonable moods. 'I cannot sleep until I have it. It is always the same. I see it for a moment, lay it out of my hand and it vanishes, lost irrecoverably in the general chaos of this house.'

Georgiana bit her lip and moved about quietly bringing back order into the litter he had made. The pamphlet was found, of course, in his own bookshelf but the storm had roused other storms in her. Was all this patience of hers worth while? Did not his selfishness feed on her forbearance, and swell to monstrous size? Yet, with all her forbearance, she could not win tranquillity, either for him or for herself. Had she three times the patience it would be the same. She remembered ironically how the patient Grizzel and the Lady Godiva had been created by masculine brains for their own diabolical ends.

He was calm at length and thought he might sleep a little if she would leave him alone. *She* slept badly and woke with a headache, but he had forgotten his ill-humour in a malicious recollection of one of Mazzini's absurd schemes.

'He proposes to invade Italy with balloons and drive out the Austrians from the sky. One Mussi has invented a balloon which can be controlled as perfectly as a steamboat.'

Mazzini's schemes touched an answering chord in Georgiana. 'There is something romantic, something which flatters the imagination in the idea of starting up a nation in a manner never heard of before,' she said pensively.

'As if personating the fallen angels were a likely way to win a war,' he sneered.

She did not answer, and having the last word in so unanswerable an argument put him in a good temper. He had a thousand errands for her. There was a picture he wanted framed; he had promised Mrs. Dickens that she would write about a housemaid; he had heard that Colliers, the jeweller at the top

of Sloane Street, had some Geneva watches; *he* had no time to look at them, but she might see them for him. And there was that inconceivably cheap chintz Mrs. Carlyle had mentioned, would it not be wise to have some to cover that delicate new furniture in his room? And, for God's sake, could not a man have a cake baked in his own house instead of being given these kickshaws from a confectioner's? And, while he thought of it, there must be an end to this acquaintance with Mrs. Richmond.

Georgiana held her aching head. Arthur kicked his chair over and strode about the room.

'This George Sandish excess of humanity makes me a laughing stock. Your doctrine in this matter, Georgiana, is infamous.'

She did not feel equal to a battle, and, having strode about the dining-room knocking things over, until he had it in complete disorder, he betook his restlessness to his study overhead and then strode violently from wall to wall, stamping and raging, and presently thumping with a poker because the young lady next door must needs begin to practise scales.

'Can a man find no peaceful corner in this house!' he shouted, rushing down the stairs.

Presently, when all was quiet once more, Georgiana took up her pen to write to Caroline. Only in complete seclusion could she enjoy that greatest of her pleasures, for when Arthur was about he seemed to cast a shadow between her and her pen.

'Emily has been clamouring for news of you. How is your gay Paris world? And Jeremy? Sir Timothy is well, I know, for he and young Tim called in two days ago on their way from Dover to the North. Here all is much as usual. Old Plinton was here yesterday and having talked until I fell into a dream was suddenly quite silent. I woke with a jump and found him fast asleep. I left him so, thinking it quite the most friendly way of paying a morning call. He was wakened by the Mortimers, male and female, a pretty little thing she is, but a considerable goose. She made the most loving inquiry after you

and, of course, after Arthur, who was as silent as a mouse overhead lest she should suspect him in the house. He is deep in a new book, though I have not seen it, for the house is in a climax of disorder which always means a masterpiece is being conceived. It is an evil case for anyone as punctual and tidy as I am. He has, I think, lost money, for we are having great economies. I have turned several ancient shirts into fewer good ones; there is this and that to do each day until I find myself saying, "May I be damned if I ever undertake anything for the good of anyone again." Bear witness that this is my resolve.'

Caroline always flitted over for a glimpse of London in May; she thought Georgiana was looking tired and that Emily was pale and oddly silent.

'What ails the child!' she asked.

Georgiana hesitated; the child had given her no confidence, but she was fully aware of the romantic ideas which flitted through that sleek little head. Would Emily be angry if she betrayed a confidence which had not been given? Better, perhaps, to keep silence, even to Aunt Caroline; childish dreams were so fragile, and more than a dream might be destroyed by good-natured ridicule.

'It is time, I think, she went to school.'

'High time,' assented Caroline. 'Let me have her in Paris for a year. I'll talk to Arthur.'

Caroline's French friends in London came to call on her and all made much of Georgiana. Arthur said bitingly; 'Women only value the small change of friendship and prefer those who offer trifling attentions to those who have their real interests at heart.'

'Silly women do,' retorted his wife crisply. 'Is the conduct of *silly* men always above criticism?'

Arthur was prodigiously annoyed; she so seldom answered tartly that he had a sudden, and alarming, view of her as that abomination, a woman with views of her own. He was at the moment in the toils of a golden-haired siren and less apt than

usual to bully his wife, since he saw less of her and was being more than usually discreet. He opposed all her wishes as usual, but more reasonably. Caroline’s presence in the house, however, stiffened Georgiana’s resolution; Emily must go to France, and, since her wishes would not serve her, she must prick him to a quarrel and put him in the wrong.

She found her pretext; he had forgotten to post her letters, important letters; they fell from his pocket as she touched his coat.

‘It is no fault of mine,’ he exclaimed irritably. ‘I have no recollection of ever having charged myself with them.’

He never owned himself to be in the wrong; he would not listen to her plans for Emily; she knew him to be pressed for money, and used the crudest weapon in her armoury.

‘Then Caroline will delay the payment of my money,’ she said, and left him to rage in the empty room.

It was unfair to Caroline to make such use of her; Georgiana owned it.

‘It is not happiness I look for any longer, Caroline, but what I do ask of Heaven is peace.’

‘You have a good deal of tranquillity within you, my dear, I think. And Fontenelle, I fancy it was, observed in speaking of Hell that “he flattered himself one would get used to it”. Do you suppose he spoke the truth?’

Caroline was angry. Georgiana seldom complained, never to anyone but her; why should so sweet a creature be bullied by an egotistical brute? A word of sympathy stiffened Georgiana into a new phase of fortitude.

‘There are so many things to do. I might be more unfortunate,’ she acknowledged. ‘Work and study and charity leave little time to brood.’

‘Are they satisfying?’

Georgiana laughed. ‘On the whole the pleasures of benevolence, between ourselves, are not a whit less visionary than any other pleasure underneath the moon.’

'I suspected it,' Caroline said drily.

'There is a moment of satisfaction, of the moral rather than the aesthetic kind, in putting a starved old woman into a red flannel petticoat, but then one reflects, 'She will pawn it, of course.'

'Do you find aesthetic satisfaction in Arthur's friends?'

Georgiana laughed again. 'The females never speak a word, Caroline, but sit with their eyes fixed on Arthur as if they had paid a shilling at the door.'

Caroline carried her point and took Emily back with her for six months in Paris. Georgiana saw them off for Dover in the Grants' fine carriage, and then, there being every appearance of a fine day, set out in an omnibus to buy tea and coffee at Fortnum and Mason's. She called at the London Library and brought away the latest French books, one of George Sand's which she had not read and two of Paul de Kock's; she would insure against the loneliness which Emily's departure would emphasize. Arthur, in a huff, had betaken himself to the country home of his latest charmer. For the first time his wife had seriously contemplated the possibility of leaving him and returning with the Grants to Paris. Sir Timothy, seldom unconventional in his outlook nowadays, had counselled it; he retained his old preference for her and detested Arthur, whom he considered a peculiarly objectionable specimen of the new and bumptious middle class which was invading the sacred enclosures of the well-born. Caroline told him not to be ridiculous; Arthur Quisite, horrid as they found him, was of good enough birth, and, indeed, since his elder brother's death, was heir to an ancient baronetcy, and, in view of his father's infirmities, might succeed to it any day.

Sir Timothy snorted, 'If he were of low birth there might be some excuse for his ill-breeding.'

Georgiana's hesitation was but momentary; the position of a woman separated from her husband was unenviable, and would entail a situation intolerable for Emily. She was not jealous of

her husband in any ordinary sense of the word; his fancies were evanescent, and she had his habit of preference for her over all other women, though he showed it in so odd a way; if she left him the bottom would fall out of his world. Desertion was out of the question; she sat down beside a basket of his mending, and, filling her needle, let her thoughts follow Caroline and Emily on the road to France.

Arthur came back from his jaunt with rheumatism and qualms in his inside; there was nothing for it but bed and a blue pill and, of course, his wife always at his side in case he wanted her. How could she leave him?

Young Tim Grant was her greatest comfort nowadays. Though something of a dandy, he avoided extravagances and set himself very seriously to make his way at the bar. While his father lived he could count on his influence and financial help, and the stain on his birth was hardly remembered except among a few old, uncensorious, friends; but when Sir Timothy died his situation must of necessity be far more precarious, and young Jeremy's succession to the title would draw attention to his illegitimate birth. He must make a name for himself and put a good face on his situation; he was fond of his father, unresentful in his company, and attached to his young half-brother, but his heart was given to Caroline who had been his mother and his friend; a great deal for Caroline's sake, a little for her own, he attached himself to Georgiana.

On a gusty March day in 1843 he took her to the Chinese Exhibition which, like all exhibitions, tired her dreadfully. They returned to find Arthur in a state bordering on distraction; his father was dead, suddenly, and all must fall on his shoulders, so little able to bear this fresh distress. His wife wasted no time in hypocritical condolences but called him a cab and put him into it, with young Tim Grant in attendance to purchase his ticket and see him into a train; from that point Providence must look after him, and no doubt it would, in the form of some pretty woman.

As it happened the woman was in the same railway carriage, extremely pretty and even more artful than most of her kind.

On her husband's return Georgiana was not long in perceiving that it would require every shred of her patience to handle the situation which was arising. The charmer expected to sit, perpetually and publicly, burning incense at Arthur's feet. Later on he would say 'For God's sake get rid of the woman for me', but for the moment he was enjoying it, and looking even more foolish than usual, with a perpetual, self-satisfied smirk upon his face. The lady's husband hovered anxiously in the background while she cooed her admiration and shed tears over the sensibility of Sir Arthur Quisite's new book.

'It must have been from seeing such a woman as Marianne in tears that old Burton came to his conclusion that "the spectacle of a woman weeping is no more moving than that of a goose going barefoot",' said Georgiana to Caroline. 'I am, very naturally, in a state of reaction against the *cant* of sensibility which has led me such a devil of a life.'

Arthur's ideas had enlarged to fit his changed state; he was a landed proprietor now, though the estates were mortgaged, and must entertain upon a fitting scale. Georgiana must give 'up her sitting-room to be turned into an extra drawing-room.

'Soirées with one maid!' she exclaimed. The idea appalled her, and she could coax no more of her own money out of her husband to keep up this new state. Emily must come home and have a governess; a baronet's daughter could not go to school.

'You may see to it,' said his wife drily.

'Of course, my love; I am much the fittest person to do so.'

Lady Quisite looked on grimly while he grappled with the problem he had raised. He advertised in the press, and sat back with satisfaction to wait for the model governess to walk in. Georgiana was reminded of Mrs. Sterling's story of the two hundred and eighty nursery governesses who had trooped up *her* stair, when, at eight o'clock in the morning, women

of all ages began to troop into the Square from all points of the compass, congregating in groups of three or four until the clock struck nine; then there was a rush of fifty to demand admission, with fresh arrivals treading on their heels. Lady Quisite put on her bonnet and shawl and slipped out of the house by the area door.

She went to call on Mrs. Macready, who was, as usual, in the family way, and who began at once to talk of the dreadful depression of spirits she laboured under.

'Oh,' Georgiana essayed to console her, 'everyone, I suppose, has their own fits of depression to bear up against if the truth were told.'

'Do you say so,' exclaimed Miss Macready incredulously. 'Oh no, surely. Some people are never out of spirits, yourself for example. I really believe you do not know what it is to be sad for one moment, one never sees you but you wear a cheerful face and have some diverting tale to tell.'

Lady Quisite gave her an odd look, but no answer, and congratulated herself on having played her part so well.

'Everything comes to an end if one have patience,' sighed Mrs. Macready. Georgiana agreed, and set her laughing with the tale of a bride who had called the day before.

'I was prepared for something unprepossessing, but her lean little figure, without so much as a button to round its angularity, and her dry little voice that made one want to sneeze, shocked me so much that I could not look her bridegroom in the face, and wondered afresh what men will do for the sake of £10,000 a year.'

Miss Macready laughed, delighted at the gentle malice. 'Miss Foxley is returned from Germany quite rabid against marriage, and all agog with what she calls *new ideas*,' she said brightly. 'She says that Varnhagen, Bettina and all the thinkers of Germany have arrived at the conclusion that marriage is a highly immoral institution as well as a dreadfully disagreeable one.'

Mrs. Macready tactfully changed the subject and sent for tea.

'We buy our tea in Pall Mall for five shillings a pound,' she said. 'As good as for five and six in Chelsea, but it is not, I think, safe in London to venture lower than that. I forgot to thank you for the silk which I have already worked up into a purse for the bazaar. Lady Joscelyn is working for our Irish one.'

'Lady Joscelyn?'

'Yes. She, you may remember, is that daughter of Lady Palmerston who had Count Giuliano for a father. She is living close by here.'

'Ah yes. I remember.'

'Did you hear that absurd tale of Mrs. Bancroft? She was dining at the Palmerston's and had forgotten that Lady Palmerston had been married before, and professedly had no children by her second husband, only two of Lord Cowper's children being Palmerston's. Mrs. Bancroft was being vastly civil, and, I think, too truthful, for she said, 'I am quite astounded that your ladyship does not see the wonderful likeness there is in your second son to Lord Palmerston.'

Tea and gossip! Tea and gossip! That was Arthur's taste, rather than hers, though she sometimes, as to-day, enjoyed it. Georgiana was pensive as she rode home in the omnibus. How charming Emily Lamb had been to Caroline and herself years ago; how far away the world of fashion and its standards of conduct seemed to her now. Emily Lamb was Lord Palmerston's wife now, after a discreet marriage with Lord Cowper, and had long passed out of her ken; Georgiana van Cott realized, rather startled at the knowledge, that her standards of behaviour had become quite middle-class; she considered infidelity in a wife quite reprehensible.

She found Arthur prostrate on his bed, the would-be governesses dismissed, not too civilly. He could not cope with the situation which his vanity had provoked, and looked to

her to deal with it for him. She arranged for Emily's studies herself, and Arthur, for once, forbore to criticize.

She was less fortunate in the control of her household; her husband interfered in everything, and the servants detested him. She had had no personal maid since her mother's death, and no manservants, for the sake of economy, but cooks and housemaids came and went continuously, irritated by Arthur's disorder, or affronted by his temper. The one maid of her lament was not, of course, always true, yet it often seemed to her that between the procession of those going and of those coming she was often left with no more than one in the house. The one was an elderly housemaid, who had been brought up at King's Wimborne by Mrs. Van Cott, and seemed to have taken a vow never to leave Miss Georgiana; Thirza Jago was a perennial source of comfort to her mistress to whom she sometimes appeared as a life-buoy in a raging sea. Thirza was equal to any occasion, but the great house in Berkeley Square and its capricious master defied the ministrations of a solitary faithful maid.

It was in the summer of 1845 that Georgiana became aware of some profound change in Arthur; he was quieter, more furtive; he was less given to angry outbursts though even more irritable than before. He was, quite obviously, worried, but the mildest question on the subject threw him into a rage. Was it money or a woman? For a long time his wife could not be sure. Then, with the suddenness of an earthquake, disaster came and found her utterly unprepared for its magnitude.

The great bubble of the railway speculation burst, and left ruin for those who had gambled in the shares; Mr. Hudson, the Railway King, vanished after the usual fashion of financial magnates who have blown iridescent bubbles to burst in other hands than theirs. Arthur, with the grandiose ideas which his accession to the Quisite estates had roused in him, and their endless requirements which used gold as a sieve does water, had used his wife's money to make more, and had lost more of

it than at first he cared to confess. Something, thanks to Tim Grant, was saved from the wreckage; the Berkeley Square house found a tenant; the Quisite lands a purchaser. Georgiana settled in a lodging in Chelsea, and Caroline offered her King's Wimborne as a home. The situation might have been worse, she acknowledged cheerfully, but she only spoke of the material one; the last shred of her faith in her husband had gone.

Caroline made a swift descent and removed Emily once more to a happier atmosphere; anything Georgiana wanted might be hers at a word, but financial help, she owned bitterly, would be fatal for Arthur, and for herself she wanted nothing but her lost dreams.

'He will write again now, he must,' she told her sister. 'And perhaps in work may find salvation.'

She was right. Arthur, shamed a little, began a new, and, *he* said, better book that would restore their fortunes. Georgiana was relieved, if sceptical, but she kept her doubts to herself.

'Oh Caroline, I am always sad at the bottom of my heart,' she wrote. 'My external life is all smoothed over and flows on quietly enough, but underneath! I thank heaven always for our mother's lessons on the value of good sense, they save me often when I find myself in danger of being swept out to sea on a torrent of sensibility and self-pity. Happily the world troubles very little what we have deep down and only sees the surface; the trouble to be guarded against is plaguing one's fellow creatures with one's private griefs, as I do you, but only you, poor Caro. I miss accustomed comforts less than I anticipated; with Thirza I manage very well indeed. I sit mending Arthur's stockings and reading the dreary novels of the Countess Hahn Hahn, a sort of George Sand without her genius, but clever enough, and separated from her husband, of course, really rather diverting and very good to read when one is in a state of moral collapse.'

Arthur's reformation was of short duration. The book would not *go*. In search of inspiration he went visiting at country

houses, and returned home to complain. He grumbled more particularly at the cruelty of having no peaceful place in which to work; if it were not the young lady next door with her harp, it was a cock at the end of the street, or a dog barked, or there was caterwauling, or a cab jingled by; never, never could a man have peace.

'The young lady next door has ceased twanging her harp since you banged upon the wall,' said his wife quietly. 'And there are days when hardly a cab or a dog goes by.'

'You take sides against me as usual. In all the world there is no one who ever considers *me*.'

His wife laid down her sewing and stared at him.

'The fact is I have spoiled you, Arthur,' she said quite gently. 'I have accustomed you to have all your wants supplied without visible means until you forget how much head and hands it takes to supply the common resources of a good round outlay of money.'

'That's right. Remind me of my losses.'

Georgiana sighed, and went on with her needlework. Remonstrances, she knew, were wasted; besides the poor man's nerves were sadly shaken. He rose and smoked during the night because he could not sleep, and smoking seemed to aggravate his complaint instead of curing it; his irritability and unsettledness were things that could not be figured, except by those who witnessed them. He had always had an inveterate tendency to hope the worst; he expected a sound and went on listening for it, and if it never began it had agitated him just the same; if one dog barked he listened for a score of them, and if one cab jingled by he expected a procession of cabs to disturb him all the day.

He could not leave things alone; for all his disorderliness it was a deadly sin to move a chair or a table two inches off the spot on which they had been used to stand. It had been one of the servants' complaints in Berkeley Square; it was a greater one now for Thirza and her single assistant, but Lady Quisite

had a genius for inspiring fervent passions in serving maids; they bore a great deal from her husband for her sake.

Arthur still had his remorseful moments; he would buy her a guinea pocket handkerchief, or take her out occasionally to Orange's to eat hot jelly, cake and cherry bounce. Such rare interludes checked her growing feeling of despair.

'The wearing of one's heart upon one's sleeve is a thing which I can neither admire nor practise,' she thought, 'but the utterly shrouding it up, is it wise, or true loyalty? It begins to look a stupidity rather than a heroism in me to stay till my life is crushed out.'

Yet she stayed, because without her it seemed as if he would go utterly to pieces, and at intervals, with groans and curses, he worked at the book, which seemed to his wife better than anything he had yet attempted . . . She nursed his nerves, so that he might work occasionally.

She had her happier moments in the company of her few close friends. There were occasional diversions from the outside world. Christmas was not unpleasant; Mr. Dickens had put a new meaning into the season with his pretty little thing *A Christmas Carol*, which had, to be sure, too much in it about eatables, but as he wrote for the greatest happiness of the greatest number he could not be expected to deny the Cockney taste in that particular.

There was a new match-box, too, that winter. Georgiana foresaw a fresh supply of trouble when Arthur received one from a new female admirer; it was very amusing; you drew the matches against a side of their little cell in pulling them out and they came forth lighted; it was hotly debated whether the inventor were a Puseyite or an anti-Puseyite. Lady Quisite was of opinion that the matches had no religious significance at all.

Georgiana paid her calls in the morning; she seldom went out with Arthur, and it was remarked. He was too self-engrossed to notice it, but presently some absurd rumours

reached her. If she were to succeed with her self-imposed task of protecting him she must sometimes be seen. There was a party at the Macreadys' to which she had earlier refused an invitation; perhaps it might be wise to go. Her temples were throbbing, but to change her mind again and send an excuse where she had just hastily begged a renewal of the invitation would never do. She dressed herself and sat down to wait for the cab. Emily at her side was quiet as a mouse.

Arthur looked at her critically, and with falling face.

'My love,' he said. 'I never saw you look worse. Your face is like chalk.'

She smiled wanly. 'You cheer me, Arthur.'

For a moment she felt desperate, wracked with a sharp pain and a longing for her bed. She would not yield to it, and, presently, was glad.

It was a most agreeable party; Mr. Forster was there, and Mrs. Carlyle, Maclise the artist and Thackeray, and Mr. Dickens in wild spirits acting the conjuror. Emily was enchanted, pulling crackers and dancing sedately with the gigantic Mr. Thackeray. Lady Quisite was diverted by the sight of an elderly female trying to indoctrinate one of the small Dickens children with 'Socinian Benevolence', the child, 'about the size of a quartern loaf' as Mrs. Carlyle put it, was sitting on a low chair gazing in awestruck delight at the reeking plum pudding which its father had just pulled out of a hat and was bewildered by Socinian twaddle.

The party was in great spirits; Georgiana caught the infection, and it did her good. Arthur was pleased with her, and his approval warmed her, though she half despised herself for caring what he thought.

The book was out at last and achieved an undoubted success, though some of his earlier admirers expressed their disappointment at its lack of sweetness; Georgiana, reading it again in print, was enormously cheered by her reading; it *was* better, harsher and more real, with less gush and twaddle in it,

less amorphous, with sharper edges and some bright spears of wit.

She expressed little of her own opinion, but wrote cheerfully to Caroline:

'He seems content with its success so far, it is talked about and that is the great thing - for a bookseller. Whether for praise or blame is a secondary question, but it is more praise at present. The bookseller has sent us a magnificent present of books, and attentions from booksellers are an infallible sign of a rise in the world.'

Undoubtedly it was selling; Arthur expanded like a flower in the sun; his vanity, as his wife had long suspected, rested on no sure foundation, and swelled to its most gigantic proportions when he was least sure of himself. He was sure of himself for the moment, and was much less insufferable. He must be seen everywhere, though, and it would not be amiss if his wife and daughter were seen with him. Meekly they agreed.

They went to a public performance of an amateur play, a darling scheme of Forster and Dickens, to which six or seven hundred people were invited, many of them from the fashionable world; old Lady Holland was there and the Duke of Devonshire, who had once been a playmate of hers, Lady Quisite, rather absent-mindedly, told her daughter. But fortunately, she said, they did not see her and it pleased her much better to talk to young Alfred Tennyson and Mrs. Carlyle.

Emily was pensive. She was a secretive child, but she was bursting with questions about that fashionable world on which her mother turned her back. Even Aunt Caroline evaded these questions. Emily brooded over the hints she had heard, as she sat stitching demurely at the embroidery which she was doing for a stool for her mamma. Aunt Caroline, who had not by any means turned her back on the world of fashion, spoke slightly of it.

'The Court is not what it was, my love, so priggish and

solemn. How different it was in the Regent's time, or even dear Queen Adelaide's. London grows more and more like a funeral party. If I had not been very much occupied during these last weeks I really think I should have been tempted to send for sixpennyworth of arsenic. Everlasting rain, the air a solution of soot, everyone sworn in a general conspiracy to tell a tragical or disagreeable tale.'

Georgiana laughed. 'My late guest has always a tale of woe.'

'Happily I never liked her much, so I can bear her misfortunes like a Christian,' said Caroline.

Emily stitched away silently; she hoped that they would forget that she was there.

'Do you really find Society much altered, Caroline?' asked her sister. 'Oh yes, indeed. It is both duller and more vulgar than in my youth. Then we took ourselves and our order for granted; now everyone seems bent on self-advertisement. Upon my honour I believe that if a lady were tried for murder she would have a better chance of getting on in Society than one of whom nothing had been heard - if she escaped hanging or transportation, of course.'

'If it is so much deteriorated then there is no object in presenting Emily to it,' said Georgiana slyly.

Emily started, and Caroline rose at once to the bait.

'My love, what nonsense. Of course she must be presented. Will you do it, or shall I?'

EMILY

Meyerbeer: *Robert le Diable*



Robert, Robert, toi que j'aime
Et qui reçus, qui reçus ma foi,
Tu vois mon effroi, tu vois mon effroi.
Grâce, grâce pour toi même,
Grâce, grâce pour toi même,
Et grâce, et grâce pour moi.



CHAPTER I

IN old age Emily remembered Lady Blessington more vividly than any other flamboyant personage of her youth; she retained a mental picture of her driving about London in a barouche, her head apparently muffled in a turban, with Count D'Orsay, in his chocolate coat and tight pantaloons, at her side, looking very handsome and elegant, though Aunt Caroline assured her that he could not hold a candle to Beau Brummell.

It was Lady Blessington rather than Count D'Orsay, however, who had captured Emily's attention; Gore House had for her the fascination of a forbidden paradise. A noticeably quiet child, she was extraordinarily precocious, and missed very little of the gossip which eddied over her demure, unnoticed head. After Lady Blessington herself the child's interest was centred in the blonde Miss Howard, who was a close rival of her ladyship in the shimmering throng which moved about the great reception rooms in the intricate maze of a never-ending dance. Miss Howard focused attention; Mr. Kinglake, an unmannerly person, was engaged in a noisy dispute over her with Prince Louis Napoleon. Would they fight a duel? Emily hoped so. She was still enormously interested in Prince Louis Napoleon; for some quite unfathomable reason he embodied all her ideas of romance, and this conception of him was magnified a hundredfold when he vanished into the fortress of Ham. The scheme had been so splendid that its failure mattered little; besides, he would, of course, escape and try again.

Her father had returned from Lady Blessington's with a tale which made him roar with laughter. Prince Louis

Napoleon had dined there, wearing a large spread eagle in diamonds clutching a thunderbolt of rubies, and had caused a sensation by inviting the company to dine with him that day twelve month at the Tuileries when, as Emperor of France, he would be enchanted to welcome them. A few days later they had heard of his absurd attempt at Boulogne and of the humiliating captivity which followed it. A *farceur*! Emily clenched her small hands to conceal her anger. A *farceur* indeed! A hero.

Her estimate of him was the juster of the two; he had the supreme gift of patience, and another, almost as important, that of being impervious to ridicule.

'J'ai attaché le fil; je me suis ressuscité de moi même et avec mes propres forces, et je suis aujourd'hui, à vingt heures de Paris, une épée de Damocles pour le gouvernement. Enfin j'ai fait mon canot avec de veritables écorces d'arbres; j'ai construit mes voiles, j'ai élevé ma rame et je ne demande plus aux dieux qu'un vent qui me conduit,' he was reported to have said.

He believed in his star, and one strange little girl shared his belief. They both had an absolute faith in their Fate.

Ham held him for six years, and only occasional unromantic and quite unexciting scraps of his news drifted across the Channel, but Emily continued to believe in him, and in the meantime she grew up.

Arthur's follies in the Blessington circle had one advantage, he rescued young men from perdition and brought them home to lose their hearts to his daughter, who was all that Lady Blessington was not. As Emily grew from childhood to girlhood her father's interest in her increased; he bragged of her, sweeping her into the circle of his vanity as if she had been a masterpiece of his, and brought artists to look at her. Hayter painted her, and her portrait appeared in the Book of Beauty. It was not only the callow youths who knelt at her feet; Disraeli, Dickens, George Smythe, Bulwer Lytton visited Arthur and looked at Emily, without a hint of impropriety, of course.

EXCITEMENT OVER THE POLKA 1844

Mr. Thackeray threatened to put her into a book, and Mr. Disraeli was accused of having done so.

Arthur Quisite's daughter was something quite extraordinary among Victorian young ladies. She was – it was Prince Louis Napoleon who said it – seductive, which was a dangerous, almost terrible, word to apply to a well-brought up young person. She had a small, pale oval face with enormous dark eyes that were quite enigmatic, a mouth for which 'seductive' was the exact and only word. Her shoulders were exquisite and her figure, though almost too slender for the mode, was the epitome of grace, and – this was where they found her astonishing – she knew how to converse, even at sixteen. She was quick to understand, penetrating in her questions and criticisms, and she had an alluring turn of phrase. Georgiana's taste for things Parisian, which she shared with her sister, though in lesser degree, should have been satisfied with her daughter, for Emily was as Parisian in essence as if she had been born on the boulevards, yet Georgiana, whose own candour detested the evasive, found herself disconcerted by her daughter. Was Emily sly?

She had been such a docile, quiet, demure little girl that her sudden emergence, while still a child in years, into a self-possessed young woman had been startling. The change, it seemed to Lady Quisite, had arrived with the Polka. One moment all London, turning its back on the new-fangled dances from the Continent, had been revolving in the old-fashioned waltz and her daughter was a child; the next, all London had gone mad over the new steps and Emily was grown up. She had, by an odd coincidence, seen the introduction of the new dance, on one of her rare excursions into the modish world, at Mrs. Spencer Stanhope's. Six ladies danced it before an excited audience, among whom it created a veritable sensation; Lady Jersey, the Duchess of Bedford and other great ladies climbing on chairs like a troop of monkeys to have a better view. Emily, who had danced the Polka at her

Aunt Caroline's in Paris, was in great request as a performer. Georgiana, with misgivings, saw her daughter launched in the fashionable world at the too early age of sixteen. Her father was enchanted, and appeared, for the first time in his life, to take an interest in something not wholly egotistical. He took the child a good deal into the world of *ton* which her mother shunned, and was proud of her, not wholly as a reflection of himself. Emily appeared to enjoy herself, but she wore, to her troubled mother, an air of expectation, an appearance of regarding her present amusements as no more than an agreeable means of killing time. She should have been waiting, dewy eyed, for love, but her poised expectation suggested nothing so young.

On a May morning in 1846 Prince Louis Napoleon returned to London. On his first walk up Bond Street he met Sir Arthur and Miss Emily Quisite. He was pale and grave and his shaving did not please the elegant Count D'Orsay; six years of imprisonment had increased his natural taciturnity, yet Emily, with exquisite tact, extracted from him most of the details of his sensational escape. He was never averse from the company of a charming, pretty young girl; in his present pre-occupation he certainly perceived in her no more than that. But Georgiana, watching her child anxiously while not appearing to do so, was aware of some burning, subterranean excitement in her.

It was Aunt Caroline who, in the end, presented Emily at Court. A feeling of delicacy had always kept Lady Quisite from making her own curtsy at this court. Dear Queen Adelaide had been kindness itself and had always welcomed her, but she had not cared to risk a snub from the youthful Victoria, who must certainly be influenced by the prejudices of the Duchess of Kent, a formidable woman, who looked very coldly upon those of the favourites of earlier courts about whom rumour had been busy; illicit royal blood was no passport to her favour, even if the possession of it were no more than a vague rumour.

IMPROVING CONVERSATION AT WINDSOR 1847

Windsor was growing primmer and primmer; there was improving conversation and censorious comment; they went early to bed, and laughter and dancing began to look like major sins. Caroline returned from a visit there bored almost beyond bearing and yet trilling with laughter.

'So mystical and German, my love, so stiff and grim, so utterly unlike the Regent's time or even good-natured King William's. Why have they imported this absurd German notion that some divinity hedges the throne? All their predecessors had such easy natural manners. Indeed, I remember once hearing an acquaintance say of King William that it took a king to show one what good manners were, and he was sometimes an explosive, peppery old gentleman.'

'Did they receive Emily well?'

'Civilly, my love, they are incapable of more.'

'And that, I suppose, was as your niece, not as my daughter.'

'La, my love, I think they have forgot your existence. But she was known for Arthur's daughter. They have, I gather, decided to give a limited approval to his books. Your girl, my dear, if I mistake not, is going to have a raging success.'

It seemed to Georgiana, as time passed, that Caroline's prophecy was not wholly verified. Emily did have a raging success in a limited circle; very young men, almost without exception, lost their heads and hearts over her, but the older men, the brilliant matches, held aloof, and the women, particularly the young ones, seemed to shun the girl. Emily could be charming, but she had a caustic tongue, quite unnerving to those deceived by her demure air into taking liberties.

Miss Quisite was certainly prudent. She had no intention of losing her heart to any young man unless he had reached, or seemed certain to reach, some eminence, and already possessed a purse extremely well furnished. Her mother, who had defied disillusionment and kept a romantic heart, deplored her child's apparent lack of softness and emotion. Ambition seemed so odd a quality in so young and so dearly loved a child; hardness

was quite outside her own experience; Caroline's cynicism was only skin-deep, her real tenderness as warm as Georgiana's own. Lady Quisite sighed when she considered how large a share of Arthur's egotism seemed to have descended to his daughter, but her eyes opened in genuine horror when she stumbled suddenly on a glimpse of the goal at which her daughter's ambition aimed. Emily had set her cap at Prince Louis Napoleon.

He had taken a house in King Street Houses, Sir James's, and, in a grave way, led a not wholly reputable life. His expenses at home and at Crockford's steadily increased and engulfed his income; cards and Miss Howard were a constant drain. He retained a certain popularity in the Gore House circle, but his prestige was not quite as high as it had been; he was nearly forty and had achieved nothing; debonair adventurers should have reached a goal by then, for each year after forty steals something from the romantic aspect of adventure, and he had never worn the light-hearted air of youth. His own faith in his star burned as brightly as ever, but the faith of others was burning dimly; old Louis Philippe seemed so very firmly settled on his throne; Prince Louis's two efforts to unseat him had been so very abortive and absurd; he had really no political importance, and neither money nor influential friends; about him, if the truth were told, there was nothing remarkable except the glamour of his name - the Emperor's nephew; it gave him a social importance, but not a political one; that talk of his star which had once been so impressive now only made people stare and titter, impressing no one, except his friend Persigny.

At least, so Arthur Quisite said in the hearing of his wife and daughter. Neither of the ladies made any comment. Georgiana thought that if the Prince were ever to achieve anything he would have taken at least one step forward before this; if he were waiting an opportunity, why such an opportunity might never arrive. She glanced at her daughter curiously, though

with a casual air. Emily's eyes were cast down in that extremely demure way which annoyed her mother, but her fingers were clasped so tightly that the knuckles shone white. Georgiana perceived with immense misgiving that Emily still believed in the Prince's star, and debated her own course.

'He should marry,' said Arthur after a pause, and so suddenly that both ladies started. 'He should marry an Englishwoman with money, Miss Angela Burdett, for instance.'

'Let me see,' said Georgiana innocently. 'There was the pretty Miss Seymour a short time ago, and have I not heard that he has been paying attention to Miss Emily Bowles?'

'Pshaw!' said Arthur testily. 'You women are all gossips. There was nothing in that, at least there is nothing now because . . .'

'Because,' put in Emily softly, 'of the lovely Miss Howard.'

Arthur jumped as if he had been shot and turned a purple face upon his daughter.

'You should be in the schoolroom, miss, a pert, disobedient minx, listening to lackeys' gossip. I'll . . . I'll . . .'

'Emily, go to your room,' said her mother quietly. Emily, with the modest, downcast air which still distinguished her, glided softly from the room. But upstairs her mother heard her moving about her room singing a favourite song from Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable*:

Robert, Robert, toi que j'aime
Et qui reçus, qui reçus ma foi,
Tu vois mon effroi, tu vois mon effroi,
Grâce, grâce pour toi même,
Grâce, grâce pour toi même,
Et grâce, et grâce pour moi.

If the child chose to see a 'Robert le Diable' in Prince Louis Napoleon the comparison might appear ridiculous but might also have its dangers; it could certainly not be ignored.

CHAPTER II

JENNY LIND was in London, enchanting as the nightingale. Lady Quisite lost no opportunity of hearing her. It was said, too, that Chopin was coming. Ravishing! How musical England began to appear.

In Paris there was noisier music, guns and shouting again as there had been in 1789. Emily Quisite was visiting the Grants when the discontent came to a head and Louis Philippe fled. On February 22nd he had been King of France and there seemed no reason why he should not die in that situation; on the 24th France was a Republic and Louis Philippe an exile again.

'No one is more surprised than Paris herself,' wrote Caroline. 'There were unpopular ministers and a little financial scandal, certainly, but who thought anything of that? There was a meeting, a little rioting, nothing remarkable, and then in the night the barricades were up, the soldiers were shooting rioters, the King was on his way to that *perfidie Albion* which sheltered him before, and France is a republic again. Do not be alarmed; there is no danger for your child or us, it will soon be over.'

All Europe caught the infection from France; thrones toppled like ninepins. Caroline enjoyed the spectacle and was exhilarated by the tempo of the continental dance; it was like the wild whirling of a witches' sabbath, the antithesis of the stagnation which she abhorred. Emily enjoyed it, too; she was glowing with some secret excitement, of which Lady Grant was discreetly aware, and over the cause of which she was secretly much diverted.

'La. La. Was that it? The enterprising young man is to take another chance, and my niece to share his triumph. *Bonne chance.*'

But she kept her thought to herself and sent reassuring letters to her sister, and, for prudence's sake, as soon as it seemed safe, sent Emily back to England. If the minx were scheming she should scheme from there, not from her aunt's house, to the peril of Sir Timothy's secret diplomacy.

Even England had caught the panicky feeling; in April the cartwheel of Chartist signatures was rolled up the floor of the House of Commons; the Clubs were all marked for sacking, the Duke of Wellington had his troops in readiness, and London was voted unsafe. The Queen departed for Scotland, and the world of fashion flitted out of town after her.

Arthur Quisite was sworn in as a special constable, and told his wife, making rather a jest of it, that Prince Louis Napoleon had been sworn in too.

'He made a dash for Paris, but they sent him away again with more haste than politeness.' Arthur was inclined to be spiteful about his former friend; Georgiana wondered if he had been too pressing in his attentions to the fair Miss Howard. Arthur had so little tact when he had had too much to drink, and he certainly admired the lady.

Lady Quisite laughed ruefully; if only she could tell Arthur what a silly child he was; but, of course, she could not, could never tell him anything about himself that faintly resembled the truth.

'He said,' Arthur went on scornfully, 'that the peace of London must be preserved.'

That made Georgiana smile, too, for she was perfectly sure that Prince Louis Napoleon had no intention of preserving the peace of France. Suddenly, in the midst of her amusement, she felt anxious, terribly anxious. What was going on in that sleek little head bent over its plate? Louis Napoleon, she knew as clearly as if he had taken her into his confidence, was planning a *coup d'état*. What scheme was maturing in Emily's brain? She sat, now, silent, her eyes downcast, no flicker of interest or emotion visible, yet Georgiana, glancing across the

table at her, thought she was suspiciously still; excessive stillness had always presaged mischief with Emily.

They went that afternoon to hear Chopin play at a concert.

'I never heard the piano played before,' was Lady Quisite's enthusiastic comment. 'I could never have believed what capabilities were in it.'

Emily's appreciation was more temperate; she was so absent-minded, in fact, that her mother wondered if she had heard the music at all. Enigmatic child. What did she think or feel about anything?

A week later she knew, when a note from her daughter was put into her hand by a sly-faced maid. Emily, nominally on a visit to a girl friend, had taken the train to Dover and crossed alone in the packet to France. *Alone*, not even a maid for company. It was inconceivable. It was scandalous. They would never be able to hold up their heads again. Arthur behaved like a madman. What was the meaning of this escapade? Not even a maid. It was, of course, some disreputable business. There must be a man in it. He accused his wife of being privy to it, of abetting her daughter, of planning to deceive and humble him.

Georgiana said tranquilly, 'Don't be absurd, Arthur. It was inconsiderate, no more. She was concerned about Sir Timothy and Caroline; his occupation will be gone now Prince Metternich has fallen; he will feel it, and they will both be glad to have Emily, who is almost like their own child. She is spoilt and heedless, but her heart is good.'

'The only person my daughter never thinks of is her father. Tell her to return, I insist upon it. I will put the brat upon bread and water and teach her to respect her parents.'

To Georgiana's diplomatic letter Caroline returned a tactful answer.

'Sir Timothy is naturally a little upset. I beg you to leave the child with us, her company distracts him. Paris, my love, is most diverting. You should come and see.'

'Caroline is an angel,' thought her sister. 'God bless her for understanding and determination not to be earnest for other people's pleasure; but to be just what God has made her, the enemy of cant and lover of all mirthful things.'

'It is a great faculty, that of being able to throw off all serious things,' said Arthur sharply. 'Yet *I* would not care to have it.'

'I see well enough how much better people are who have it,' said his wife crisply. 'They both enjoy their life and contribute to the enjoyment of others. . . .'

Emily was still in Paris in June. Though she had not seen him, Georgiana knew that Louis Napoleon was still in London. What was her child doing? Her letters spoke of none but the most trivial things. Lady Quisite's anxiety grew intolerable; she must go and see the girl, and solve this problem if she could.

With a fresh-cheeked, frightened kitchen wench in attendance, since Thirza was not well enough for the journey, Georgiana set out for Paris, where the excitement seemed to be growing from day to day. The Channel crossing was rough; her companion, scared and seasick, lay prone upon a bench. Lady Quisite settled the girl kindly, bade her keep still, and, wrapping herself in an old travelling coat belonging to her husband which she had caught up hurriedly, paced, a little unsteadily, up and down the deck. She was too restless to keep still and had always been a good sailor. What was she to do when she reached Paris? How could she win the confidence of her secretive, troublesome child; a false step might precipitate a crisis, open an abyss from whose depths it would be impossible to rescue Emily. What was the girl scheming? Was it possible that she had some secret understanding with the French adventurer, who, it seemed to her evident, was once more preparing to make a bid for a throne. The child had such a passion for plots and intrigues, an overwhelming sense of drama of the cruder kind; a silly passion, no more to be re-

garded than her childish games, they had supposed; but if the girl, whose childish love of mysteries and drama had amused her, were really sly, without scruple? She had thought that she understood her daughter, and, sighing a little because she was not cast in another mould, had striven to turn her qualities into the safest channel; to so sunny a candour as her own tortuous, underground, schemings must always be bewildering, and, in any other than her child, distasteful. She remembered, and found comfort in the memory, that Caroline, too, had loved mysteries, yet had never carried her taste beyond discretion.

The packet dipped suddenly and nearly threw her off her feet. An outstretched arm caught her, an arm as strong and steady as an iron rail. She laughed a little breathlessly.

'Please accept my grateful thanks, sir, for such timely support.'

The young man removed his arm from about her waist, but put his hand firmly under her elbow as the boat gave another sickening lurch. Lady Quisite turned an amused glance on her rescuer.

'Why, what very blue eyes,' she thought in swift surprise. Their blueness held her attention so completely for a second that the young man was surprised in his turn. He stared back until he saw the hot blood mounting, and with a little gesture of apology withdrew his gaze. He thought she had the loveliest face which he had ever seen in his life, and that the bright flush added to its beauty. Georgiana's clear gaze had not wavered, though she was as conscious as he was of the blush. How absurd of her, at her age, to be embarrassed because a young man's stare held a too open admiration.

'I think I should be wiser to sit down,' she said lightly.

'Let me find you a seat.' He kept his hand beneath her elbow as he guided her to one sheltered from the wind. She thanked him graciously, and with a bow he turned away.

Lady Quisite's eyes followed him. 'A very courteous well-bred young man, and what very blue eyes.'

Each time he turned in his steady pacing she found herself looking into those grave blue eyes. 'If I had a son like that,' she found herself thinking. 'Someone who would help me with this headstrong girl. Someone on whom I could rely.'

Someone, in fact, who was everything that Arthur was not, but she would not allow her thoughts to wander down that path. The young man, she found, with a pleasure which she, considered a little ridiculous, was bound for Paris.

Paris, she discovered at once, was very uneasy. Crowds were parading the streets shouting, 'Vive le Prince Louis'. There were little papers with cuts of the Emperor and his nephew; the *camelots* sold Louis in profile, full face; there were scuffles, and soldiers in the streets, and men wore little eagles in their hats. There was a barricade or two. Georgiana read the signs. One dreamer seemed about to find that dreams came true, and that stars sometimes led aright.

The thought cheered her. His ambition's realization seemed to promise security for her foolish child; for, once in his goal, there would be no more dangerous plotting, and, if the girl had let *her* dreams lead her hand in hand up the steps of a throne with him, she must know her folly now, when he was half way up and unaware that she followed. Georgiana felt suddenly certain that though the child had thought too much of Louis, he had paid her no attention other than an adult gives an amusing, pretty child; if she saw more in it, the mistake was hers, and if, for a moment, he had considered her from a different angle, he must speedily have realized that she would not do, either as a mistress or a wife.

Her daughter – and the discovery pained her sharply – was not pleased to see her; Caroline gave her a sly, amused glance, which showed that she had discovered the truth. 'Not that the child tells me anything,' she said ruefully when she at last had her sister to herself. 'But I have a nose for a plot.'

Georgiana seldom made the mistake of speaking too soon or of acting too hastily. She did not now. But while she was con-

THE BARRICADES SET UP 1848

sidering the best way to deal with her daughter the storm broke over Paris. There were terrible days during which the guns roared against the barricades, while the gutters ran with blood, and Paris was alight with a dull glow. The Archbishop of Paris went out to make peace at sunset, and was shot and died; women were murdered without pity, and Paris weltered in horror for four summer days. Then it was over, talking took the place of guns once more, and Louis Napoleon was at the Hôtel du Rhin looking out of his windows at his uncle the Emperor on his column in the Place Vendôme. The excitement was of a drier, more brittle kind; even the tranquil Georgiana caught it, and Emily's eyes glittered oddly.

The young man with the very blue eyes called with a letter of introduction to Caroline, and told the ladies a very full and exciting tale. He was, he said 'a Special Correspondent', quite a new kind of job on the staff of an enterprising newspaper. He was, he explained modestly, making some headway as a writer, was one of those called 'Mr. Dickens's young men,' but he had been a sailor.

'Ah, that accounts for the blue eyes,' thought Lady Quisite.

Georgiana certainly liked him, and Caroline, amused, asked him to come again; she was immensely diverted at the thought that her sister should give even a passing thought to any man. Lady Quisite told her not to be ridiculous; if there were no other reason, the man was much too young.

'Thirty-five or six.' Caroline put her head on one side with a bird-like air of mischief. 'It would be ravishing to see you fall in love.'

Georgiana, with that pretty flush which made her look like a young girl for a moment, turned to the window.

'Mr. Charles Sebastian Hansike is a great admirer of Arthur's work and takes some interest in Emily,' she said crisply.

The crowds in the streets seemed more excited than ever.

Nous l'aurons
 Nous l'aurons
 - 'Poléon'

they were shouting.

'Louis Napoleon has followed his star,' the watcher said thoughtfully tapping her fingers on the window ledge and seeing no solution to her own problem. Arthur was growing restive; Emily was obstinately silent; she could do nothing, only depend on Caroline.

Lady Quisite went home to England in August, and, by a strange coincidence, Charles Sebastian Hansike crossed by the same packet. The young man puzzled Georgiana, but, with an odd fluttering of the heart, she owned to herself that she was nearly sure he was in love with her, or thought that he was. 'It is ridiculous,' she assured herself, but, since the man took no liberties, she could not send him to the right-about. He was consistently courteous and respectful and asked if he might call on Arthur as if that were the privilege that most he craved. Both he and Arthur would think it very odd if she said 'No'. Mr. Hansike had written a novel and was passably well-born and quite well-bred. Of course he might call.

Emily stayed with Caroline in Paris. Still no one knew her mind, though both mother and aunt might guess at its queer windings. She did nothing, apparently; did she, too, believe in a star, which would lead her without her own activity?

Louis Napoleon was President of the Republic; there were parties at the Elysée; at concerts and balls Prince Louis Napoleon was introduced to the great world of France. Would he do? It was too early to say. There were reviews and gala nights at the Opera, and Rachel to be seen at the Français. Paris was swinging into a new tune. There was a panorama of the Battle of Eylau. The Imperial eagles were regilded.

Few people took the President seriously all the same; he was so quiet; his manners were so mild, so utterly unlike his uncle's,

and there clung to him still the faint suggestion of ridicule which had pursued him in his youth.

'General Changarnier refers to him as a dejected cockatoo,' Monsieur Thiers said slyly. 'Nous lui donnerons des femmes et nous le conduirons.'

Whatever he intended, the Prince was in no hurry; he never was. He had a recurring phrase for more impetuous actors:

'Il ne faut rien brusquer.'

Things marched slowly. The trees of Liberty which had been planted on the boulevards vanished in the night, but 'Liberté, égalité, fraternité' still shouted from public buildings: 'Les trois blagues,' said modish Paris. But the President did not say such things.

Miss Howard had followed him to Paris; Emily Quisite had turned pale when she first saw her, but the lady did not meet with approval, perhaps because she was not French. The President was reproved for his indiscretion and excused himself with a good deal of emotion:

'Je m'avoue coupable de chercher dans les liens illégitimes une affection dont mon coeur a besoin.'

This was touching. Louis Napoleon needed a wife, Lady Grant's friends laughed at him. He acknowledged that need, but he was in no hurry.

The *salons* which were still Bourbon abused and tittered over the 'perroquet malade'. He was so quiet; he *did* nothing. Was he going to do anything? The only answer was, 'Ask Monsieur de Morny?'

Emily was growing restless and her aunt looked at her speculatively. The girl was as sphinx-like as the President himself, but she was very young, and so, perforce, impatient.

Caroline considered this very odd child, of whom she was fond but doubtful; not one item of the girl's code was the same as her own. What game was she playing? Or was she playing a game at all? Had she supposed that the Prince would make himself an Emperor? And if so had she seen herself as his

Empress? Or would the post of 'maîtresse en titre' content her? Was the 'perroquet malade' at all interested in the child?

Caroline's passion for intrigue made all this very exciting. There was a Spanish girl who was presented at the Elysée, a very lovely creature, at sight of whom the host's dull eyes had brightened for a moment. Caroline wondered if Emily were aware of her.

It appeared not. Lady Grant began to wonder, in the winter of 1851, if the whole business had not been a phantom of her imagination, if Emily only remained with her in Paris because she preferred it, and knew that she was welcome, and dreaded the atmosphere of petulance which Arthur spread around him at home. Yet, in that case, why should Georgiana be so anxious, since her constant wish was for her daughter's happiness. Once or twice she wondered if they were not altogether on the wrong scent; could it be Monsieur de Morny, and not the President, who had captivated her niece? M. de Morny was charming, much the more likely object of a young girl's fancy. But had Emily a fancy? Had she a heart, in fact? There was no sign of it. Caroline shrugged her shoulders, refused to be worried, and amused herself as gaily as she had always done.

'I am glad to have you with me, my love,' she said to her niece. 'But do you not think you should spend a few weeks at home?'

Emily was offended. 'Of course, Aunt Caroline, if you are tired of me.' Her startled air was illuminating.

'La, child, don't be ridiculous. Go for a month and then come back. Sir Timothy is crossing next week and will escort you. I shall expect you to return with him.'

London was having some diversions of her own. Everyone seemed to be shouting 'No Popery!' there were alarming prophecies of the terrible disasters which would occur in England owing to the Pope, Cardinal Wiseman, and the Puseyites. London, always ready for a frolic, went stark mad over 'Papal

Aggression', and the provinces, usually less excitable, caught this madness. It was quite vain to point out that the Cardinal was a cheerful, benign old man with no intention of setting up a stake for the burning of heretics in Smithfield; his name called up visions of burning faggots and a smell of brimstone.

Happily there was the Great Exhibition to distract people from these uncomfortable things. Everyone, really quite everyone, visited the Exhibition. Lady Grant ran over from Paris for a glimpse and came fluttering into her sister's drawing-room to express her contempt for it.

'Well, my love, I have been to see this eternal Exhibition. It was rather imposing for a few moments, lots of things of different kinds and quite well dressed people. The tickets, I'm told, are still five shillings, which is certainly not cheap. But it will not bear looking into; when you look at the wares in detail there is nothing worth looking at, at least nothing one could not see better at the shops, and the fatigue of even the most cursory survey is appalling, you must find me some less exhausting diversion. It is, of course, a folly to conduct it on strict teetotal lines.'

Georgiana's eyes twinkled. 'Let me see. Less exhausting? Thursday is Mr. Thackeray's lecture day,' she said pensively. 'Between you and me the lectures are no great things but it is the fashion to find them "so amusing", and the audience is quite brilliant.'

'My love, I think I do not care for lectures. Where *did* you get these gloves?'

'They were bought in the Lowther Arcade.'

'Good heavens, the most rubbishy place in London. Dear Georgiana, *how* do you pass your time?'

'Let me see,' she pretended to consider the question. 'I read a good deal. I have had several novels from the London Library lately, *The Ogilvies* written by a young Irish girl and full of love as an egg of meat, the old romantical, high-flown kind of love in demand at the circulating libraries, very odd in

these days when the "new ideas" teach that love and marriage are such great mistakes.'

'All young girls seem to write novels nowadays,' mused Caroline. 'I suppose they want to distinguish themselves, and that is the only career open to female talent just now.'

'Have you read *Shirley*? That, I think, is a late effort in that line.'

'Mr. Sterling says that *Shirley* is ridiculously like Mrs. Carlyle.

'*She* has the credit, I believe, of writing these "Jane Eyre" books.'

'She fervently denies it, and indeed, how could she manage so much labour; she is so very often ill.'

Caroline chuckled. 'Believe it, or not, my love, but on the way from the Exhibition I saw the great lion, Mr. Carlyle, toiling along on the same velocipede as that Italian painter, I forget his name, both looking very tired and cross.'

'Poor Jane Carlyle.'

'It is, I fear, dear Georgiana, the common fate of females who marry lions to find themselves neglected when the lion needs to roar.'

Arthur came in with a company, male and female, at his heels. He greeted Caroline without cordiality. One of the females, elderly and with an acid smile, crossed the room to sit by Lady Quisite.

'Tell me, my dear,' she began in a piercing whisper. 'Is your husband still as infatuated as ever with Lady Grace?'

'Of course,' said Georgiana, laughing. 'Why shouldn't he be? Is she not beautiful enough to deserve it?'

'Do *you* like her? Is she as agreeable to you as to your husband?'

'Now how can I tell, Miss Summers, *how* agreeable she is to my husband? but I *do* like her and she is extremely kind to me.'

'Hm. It is very good of you to like her when she takes all Sir Arthur's time. He is always there.'

'Oh, not quite always. He's at home at nights, and he both reads and writes, you know, which must be done in his study upstairs, no other place will do.'

'Cat,' whispered Caroline crossing the room to her sister's side. 'I saw manuscript enough on his desk to curl your hair for a month,' she added aloud. 'But I cannot say if it would curl like Millamant's.'

Miss Summers was not to be deflected. 'In the most honey marriages,' she said coyly, 'one has only to wait; sooner or later reason has to return, and how much more with an infatuation. I declare, Sir Arthur is being eloquent at this moment about Lady Grace's beauty.'

It was true. Arthur was raving about her dark haunting eyes and firm smooth flesh.

'How do you know, Arthur?' asked Caroline sharply. 'Have you been feeling it?'

He gave her one of his annihilating glances. Caroline sewed on serenely, but she was raging; had the man no decency?

Into an embarrassed silence Georgiana artfully threw the name of Mr. Darwin. At once there was a clamour.

'I think if men have faith in God, no facts, however startling, will make them doubt,' said Georgiana in answer to a question whether Darwinism detracted from her old belief or not.

There was an animated discussion as to whether Darwinism could ever be reconciled with science; the speakers grew wildly excited. Caroline, with a naughty twinkle, told a story of Mr. Darwin's own, of a pious Professor who, seeking to reconcile biology with the Bible insisted that the mastodon had become extinct because the door of the Ark had been too small for it to pass through.

Miss Summers, as might have been expected, hastened to declare herself an ardent Puseyite. 'There must be new life in the Church and a restoration, not only of faith but of churches,' she affirmed.

Georgiana wondered, but not aloud, if the Oxford reformers

had decided that God ought only to be worshipped in new and hideous Gothic churches instead of in the fine Georgian and Stuart ones which had given pleasure to the eye.

When, still arguing, the crowd had departed, Caroline offered an olive branch to Arthur by suggesting that he should take her to look at Soyer's Symposium, the transformed Gore House. For the crash had come, the gorgeous Blessington and the elegant D'Orsay had vanished, and Gore House fallen from its high estate into a public restaurant. It was not at all *convenable*, of course, for ladies to be seen at such a place, but Caroline was Caroline, still adventurous and dashing, and gaily insistent on this improper treat.

'I hear Soyer's cooking is of the best, that is to say if one has a *cabinet particulier*, but the man is certainly more enterprising in giving the masses shilling dinners at the bottom of the grounds.'

'It is the comic panorama which I die to see, all the celebrities, of the day, I'm told, vastly diverting, with very large heads and very small bodies, some on foot and some on horseback and some mounted on griffins, dragons, giraffes, elephants, hippopotami, camels, and mastodons. I think Mr. Darwin's troubled professor should be taken to see the last.'

Caroline had a ravishing evening, and charmed Arthur into his most delightful mood. It was not until the middle of November that Lady Grant and her niece returned to France. Paris seemed calm after London; the streets were quiet; the enigmatic President at the Elysée was entertaining as usual; the Grants and Emily found an invitation from him awaiting them.

CHAPTER III

ON the night of December 1st, 1851, Paris was shrouded in mist, but the Elysée windows shone brightly and the sound of dance music floated out into the fog. Lady Grant and her niece arrived at the same moment as M. de Morny, who had come on from a first night at the Opéra-Comique. The President, sombre as usual, smiled vaguely at his guests; Caroline thought, a little maliciously and with a side glance at her niece, that he had forgotten who they were. He was certainly preoccupied and she caught an exchange of glances with de Morny which seemed to hold some particular significance. Odd, she thought idly; some little political intrigue, probably. What children men were with their political games!

In the ballroom the band was playing a cotillon. Caroline, moved by some subtle quality in the atmosphere, retained an extraordinarily vivid impression of that night, though, superficially, it differed in no way from any other Monday evening party at the Elysée.

It was the sombre President's last party there. Next morning they were proclaiming the Emperor in the streets. Louis Napoleon had shown his object; he was nearly at the top of his ladder now, his star still leading him.

Except for a marked pallor Emily showed no sign of emotion; she chattered, as everyone did, of Louis's *coup d'état*, but under her calm Caroline could see that she was alarmingly excited. For an afternoon the Rue St. Honoré was swept by the shots of the Government troops; for two days there was riot and bloodshed; then Paris resumed her customary air of gaiety and lightness, and seemed, on the whole, to be pleased with the new order. The theatres were open, the Opera crowded; Paris was herself again. Louis Napoleon gave his entertainments

at the Tuileries now and attended a performance of *La Dame aux Camélias* with almost imperial state. It was only a question of time until the Second Empire was proclaimed and all Paris knew it; Emily was only reflecting "an excitement which might be seen on every face. The change was longer in coming than she had expected, but it came at last; on November 22nd, 1852, the Second Empire had passed from one man's dream into a fact, and Louis Napoleon was Emperor of France.

'Now all he wants is an Empress,' said Caroline pensively. Emily's eyelids flickered. She had been his partner in the cotillion a week before, and the watchful Caroline had seen his lips move as he bent over the girl's hand. So there *was* something. Had he offered her an honourable or a dishonourable position? Lady Grant suspected the latter, and that the girl had declined it. Odd child! Why could she not give her confidence to those who loved her; she was as secretive as ever, but alarmingly pale. How long would the situation take to develop? It could not be long, for an Empress was an imperative necessity.

Caroline, watching the drama unfolding slowly, was almost as excited as Emily. News from England called a halt to their part in it.

England was not much interested in affairs in France. London was in a state of terrible confusion with the lying-in-state of the dead Iron Duke. Georgiana had cried a little when she heard that he was dead, and Caroline had been full of tales of him in Paris at the time of the Peace. He had been an old man in their radiant youth; now he was dead they felt their own old age clutching at their flying garments. The Duke had been an Institution, the greatest figure of their world. Sincerely they mourned him.

Thousands and thousands of people to whom he had been no more than a name, yet a name that was a legend, were thronging to see the last of him, and trampling one another to death in their efforts to catch a glimpse of that old white head.



EMILY HAD A WINTERHALTER GOWN

[*Les Modes Parisiennes* 1851]

Arthur went to see the thing himself, having a *bourgeois* taste for spectacles. A policeman told him four dead bodies were lying in the workhouse; he saw two dead women carried away on stretchers; he hesitated, and, when he saw the sea of human beings swaying dangerously, gave up his intention to see the lying-in-state, and began to make his way out of the crowded streets as fast as he could with what he considered a due measure of dignity, which was too much. The crowd was out of all control. The friendly policeman shouted:

‘Take care. Take care.’

A wise man would have forgotten dignity and taken to his heels down a side street. But not Arthur; his vanity would not allow him to be hustled like a common man. He turned to face the crowd.

‘My good people,’ he began pompously. There was an alarming pressure in the centre of the mob; it broke suddenly and swirled around him like a raging torrent, carrying him off his feet.

Order was restored at last; the dead and the injured were carried away on stretchers. Arthur Quisite’s injuries were terrible; he must have been trampled by a hundred pairs of feet. He lingered for a week, showing at the end the fortitude which his wife had always believed lay dormant in him, under the vanity and egotism. She remembered only her young lover now, and tended him with passionate kindness.

Emily did not arrive in time to see her father alive. The Grants took her to England for the funeral, but Lady Quisite begged her to go back with them when it was over.

‘She did not love her father,’ she told Caroline. ‘Why should she pretend a grief she does not feel? Of all qualities I most detest humbug, Caroline. Let the child forget as soon as she can. I am going to King’s Wimborne.’

Paris was as tranquil as if there had been no upheaval. The polite world was busy table-turning and prophesying future events. It was generally conceded that an Empress was

required; it was soon known that the Emperor had a preference for Royal blood if it could be persuaded to mate with his.

There was a Princess of Portugal, a niece of Queen Victoria, more than one Princess in Germany, who seemed suitable; delicately, alliances were being discussed; they were all nebulous, but it was quite evident that the post was not open to a commoner, until all other hopes had failed.

It struck Lady Grant that Emily's gaiety was becoming a little forced, and that her face was growing too thin and sharpened for so young a girl; she would soon lose her looks at this rate. Caroline suggested a holiday at King's Wimborne, but the girl shook her head, and her aunt noticed, with misgiving, that there was a pleading look in the eyes which had been so self-reliant and hard. It was clear enough now on what bauble the child had set her heart, and equally clear that she would not get it, yet had obstinately refused to give up hope. Caroline, perplexed and anxious, sent for Georgiana . . .

Lady Quisite came hurriedly to Paris though she was far from well. Emily's thinness alarmed her, and Caroline, closely questioned, could give her little comfort. She gave her sister a clear look; there was no need for mystery between them.

'The Emperor is choosing an Empress.' Georgiana's eyes flickered with pain. 'In the meantime,' Caroline went on crisply, 'the Emperor rides with Mademoiselle de Montijo, watches her more than seems necessary, and, for so silent a man, seems to converse with her a great deal. Paris talks.'

She shrugged her shoulders. There was nothing to do but wait for the *dénouement*. In a very short time all Paris was buzzing with the news. The Emperor had chosen his Empress.

Georgiana took the news to her daughter, who lay on her bed in a darkened room 'with the migraine', she explained in a voice so carefully steadied that her mother's heart was wrung. Georgiana put her cool soft hand on the child's hot forehead. With a sudden whimper like a small animal in pain Emily

caught the hand and put it to her lips while a big tear splashed on it.

‘You’re the most wonderful person in the world, mamma.’

Georgiana’s heart lightened; the child was not so entirely self-absorbed as she had feared; there was hope for happiness in that passionate tribute. She held the thin little body in her arms while the bitter tears rained down her daughter’s cheeks.

CHAPTER IV

EMILY soon tired of King's Wimborne, though her mother seemed content to linger there for the rest of her life, mind and body lapped by a healing tranquillity which had not been hers since her marriage. She had a thousand occupations; she had innumerable friends. She sang again as Emily had not heard her sing since she was a baby:

Over the dark blue waters,
Over the wide, wide sea,
Fairest of Araby's daughters
Say, wilt thou sail with me?

Were there no bounds to the waters,
No shore to the wide, wide sea,
Still fearless would Araby's daughter
Sail on through life with thee.

'You sound like a girl, mamma,' said Emily, 'about a hundred years younger than I am.'

'Nonsense, my love. You'll be as happy as a lark again as soon as you are better. There is nothing like ill-health to depress the spirits. Drink up your buttermilk.'

They exchanged a look of understanding. Decidedly the child was better; Georgiana was astonished at the philosophic air with which she bore her disappointment; there could have been little of affection in it. She had missed her goal; very well, she would aim at one less difficult; as soon as she was quite restored they must return to London and discover a new ambition, for to Emily tranquillity was evidently a penance. Georgiana sighed.

To King's Wimborne in late September came Charles

Sebastian Hansike, without permission, since he feared it might be refused, though with great kindness. In spite of the liberty he had taken Lady Quisite was as pleased to see him as he had hoped she would be; she had a warm liking for the young man, and would have been glad to admit him to a greater intimacy if he had not developed this ridiculous preference for her which, though unmentioned, he made no attempt to hide. Caroline had quizzed her about it, though with some real concern, for the young man was, quite obviously, madly, deeply in love.

He told her so on a golden autumn evening at King's Wimborne as they walked in the orchard to watch the harvest of the pears. She would not listen.

'Dear Charles, you do me a great honour, but it is ridiculous, as you must see yourself in calmer mood. I am an old woman, more than ten years your senior. Wait until you find some charming, ardent girl, who will grow old with you in happy comradeship.'

'A sugar cake instead of a full meal,' he made a grimace. 'It is, I know, an impertinence for me to lift my eyes to you.'

'Oh, nonsense, Charles, it is a question of what is fitting, and my age is an insuperable barrier, if there were no others.'

'If you were twenty, would you have me?'

A warm flush spread over her face, her eyes flickered with laughter. 'Why do you know, I think I would.'

'Well, then?'

'Such an absurd supposition will not carry away my thirty extra years. Consider the business calmly, Charles; be sensible. All the world would point the finger of ridicule at you, of scorn at me. My daughter would be bitterly ashamed.'

'Ah, yes. I do not doubt the last argument. Miss Emily would certainly be horrified. We must get her married and occupied with affairs of her own.'

Georgiana burst into a laugh of genuine amusement. 'Why, so we must, Charles. Have you any match for her in view?'

'She will arrange it for herself if I know anything of women. 'Do you, Charles?' Lady Quisite asked slyly.

He gave her a frank stare. 'Why, yes, a good deal, but not, I think too much.' She liked him for his honesty; a frank confession, so that she might know the worst of him.

He went away gloomily, but not utterly despondent, and about Emily, of course, he was proved right.

The Quisites returned to London in October, and a month after their return Emily announced without warning that she proposed to marry Timothy Grant almost at once. Both the Grants and her mother were startled; they were all fond of Tim; he was an agreeable young man, making his way in a stolid, rather than a brilliant fashion, at the bar. As a member of the family he had been accepted without question, but as a husband for Emily he appeared totally unsuitable.

Arguments proved useless; Tim was distressed, but Emily remained unmoved. She did not love him, that was certain, though a careless affection had remained from childhood's days, yet she languished at him with her wonderful eyes and seductive mouth and a very lavish display of white shoulders until poor Tim was her abject slave, incapable of listening to remonstrance or advice.

Lady Quisite, distressed at this fresh evidence of her daughter's ruthlessness, and wounded at this latest slyness, sought for a motive, but in vain. For once Caroline was wiser.

'My love, she was thwarted in one ambition so must settle on another. This child of yours has great force of character and endless energy; she should, of course, have been herself a man, but, since she is shut out from an active career she will propel another. Young Tim is slow, unlikely to make great headway by himself; she proposes to make him, in spite of himself, into a successful man. I wish she had chosen some other object, but he, I suppose, was to her hand. We must make the best of it, Georgiana, and forget, for ever, what I have not thought of once in twenty years.'

Emily had her way, of course, and having firmly declined her mother's suggestion of a quiet wedding at King's Wimborne, led her husband triumphantly to the altar of St. George's, Hanover Square.

She would make a successful man of him; would she make him happy? Would she find happiness for herself? She was certain of it. Emily liked marriage. It suited and improved her. Having married for entirely practical reasons, rather sordid ones, her sentimental mother thought, she proceeded to attend to Tim's happiness, and very soon fell, in a steady way, in love, for she had in her composition the gift of appreciating qualities which she herself lacked.

'What an angel,' Tim wrote to the sceptical Caroline. 'How beautiful, how gifted, how good. If I ever let a moment of my life pass without some new endeavour to make this noble perfect creature completely happy may I suffer the punishment I shall deserve.'

How like Tim this pompous sentimental stuff sounded; Caroline chuckled. Georgiana, still nursing her wounds and doubts, was pensive, but Emily's first real letter, received a month later, astonished and touched her:

'You, dearest mamma, know me better than anyone else in the world. I think I have never deceived you, though often in earlier years I certainly tried to do so. Of late, though perhaps I have seemed secretive, I have been honest with you. I will be honest now. This is a letter I have written my husband, who has been absent from me for three days. It is, I swear it, true. You will, I hope and think, be glad that your daughter, little as she deserves it, has come so safely into harbour.

'Your grateful and most affectionate child.'

The letter to her husband moved Georgiana so that she read it through a mist of tears:

'Never fear for one second that your wife can love you less; her life is entirely yours so that nothing can occur to bring one little cloud into what you call your Heaven. I shall always love you and when I leave your arms my only wish will be to return to them. Dearest Tim, I shall always always love you.'

'Lucky young Tim,' said Caroline happily; Emily, after all their fears and disappointments, seemed safe, prosperous and happy.

Lady Quisite found all her occupation gone. For twenty-five years all her waking moments had been devoted to her two difficult, exacting children; what was there left?

Charles Hansike assured her that he needed her as much as they had done. He indulged, artfully, in a little self-pity.

'I never knew my mother; my father was invariably unkind. I think I have always been more lonely than anyone in the world.'

'My poor Charles.'

'Very well to say "Poor Charles"', but even you have no real pity.'

'My dear, I would do as you wish if it would not make a laughing-stock of us both, and ridicule, as you must know, is the most fatal bar to happiness.'

'Oh, damn the world, Georgiana. What *does* it matter to people like you and me?'

What did it, indeed? Emily would be annoyed; but she had chosen her own life. Sir Timothy would raise his eyebrows, Caroline be vastly diverted. No one else mattered.

Her ardent lover wore down her resistance and, half-hearted, two years after Arthur's death, Georgiana married Charles Hansike, rather in a hole-and-corner fashion, because she dreaded ridicule for him and such opposition from her daughter as would cause them all much pain. As soon as it was done she

EMILY 1846 - 1870

was glad of it, and though she warned Charles that, moral or immoral, he must leave her if it did not do, allowed herself to be engulfed with him in a happiness so complete that it seemed a dream from which she must soon wake.

CHAPTER V

GEORGIANA travelled over half the face of the globe during the next fifteen years. Charles Hansike was a very brilliant 'Special Correspondent', when that job was something of a novelty, and was always sent to any spot in which there was, or might be, anything remarkable in the way of news. They were in the Crimea during the siege of Sebastopol; they were in India during the Mutiny. They made a journey to China, looked in at Sydney and Tahiti, and crossed the Pacific to Mexico and the gold fields of California. They hurried thence to Ballarat for the Australian gold rush, were in Russia during a secret crisis and in America during the Civil War.

Georgiana found this life enchanting. For short intervals she would sit quietly in London, mending their dilapidated clothes, talking to her daughter or her sister of her adventures and the world, planning a flying visit to King's Wimborne. Then Charles would come in smiling.

'Can you be ready to start for St. Petersburg to-night, my love?' Or New York, or Rio de Janeiro, or an island in the South Seas?

'Of course, Charles.'

While her husband went to his office for instructions, she would see about tickets and passports, pack their bags, pay their bills and be waiting for him, ready, when he returned an hour before they must hurry to catch a train. Her clothes were workmanlike and often shabby, but she always contrived to slip into their luggage an elegant gown, so that she might do him credit should occasion arise. Mrs. Hansike was a far greater social success than Lady Quisite had ever been; she was always greeted rapturously wherever they found themselves;

she was worth a score of influential friends to her husband. In happiness she bloomed with a second youth.

She was fifty-five, sixty; the years rested lightly on her; her hair kept its gold-brown tints, if they were a little faded, her eyes were as bright, her figure as slim; she was never ill, seldom tired, and never complained if she were. Charles adored her, and she found in her second marriage every lovely thing of which she had been cheated in the first.

'We are ridiculous, Charles. There is always something absurd, indeed a little indecent, in elderly lovers. Are you not tired of me yet? You are quite young enough to try again.'

Charles was of opinion that he was very well as he was.

The only shadow on their happiness was that Emily would never treat Charles with anything but the chilliest civility, though she did not visit her displeasure on Georgiana. To hum, mockingly, a line or two of her mother's favourite song was her only comment when Georgiana announced a fresh expedition to the ends of the world:

Were there no bounds to the waters,
No shore to the wide wide sea . . .

If Georgiana enjoyed life in her own odd and uncomfortable way, Emily was certainly equally happy in hers.

Louis Napoleon and Eugénie went to Windsor in the spring of 1855. Emily, with her baby in her arms, laughed when she heard that he had danced a quadrille with the Queen. She watched him drive across London with his Empress to show her the house at the corner of King Street where he had lived for so long. Emily's eyes were flickering with amusement. After all, once at the top of the ladder, what was left? The climbing was more exhilarating than the arrival. Tim was getting on; he would be Sir Timothy before he was fifty, if she knew anything of the way to pull wires, earning the title which should have been his by birth. She loved him and loved her baby son, but more than either she loved the battle for success; there was

THE BEER BILL 1855

something hungry, unappeasable in her which only her relentless ambition could satisfy. Fortunately the Woolsack was still far distant; she would have occupation for many years, and then could transfer her fighting energies as reserves for the battles of her children. The secretiveness which had grieved her mother was transmuted into tact now, for no one except her mother and aunt, certainly not Timothy, had a clear view of the activities of her pretty little wire-pulling hands, of how they pushed and hastened slow Timothy towards the goal she had chosen for him, which he still supposed he had selected for himself. The Woolsack! Why not?

Though she sometimes sighed for Paris there was plenty to amuse her in London, though amusement was beginning to be quite the wrong word to describe English occupations, which were all of the most improving kind. Lord Robert Grosvenor brought in a Bill, in 1855, to suppress Sunday trading, especially in beer shops. The Beer Bill was most violently opposed, and the mob, which had been learning good behaviour for a quarter of a century, reverted once more into its earlier turbulence, as it generally will do when the subject in dispute is Beer. No Beer for the people, then no fun for the aristocrats. Emily, driving in the Park one Sunday afternoon at the hour which had been fashionable for two centuries, found her carriage surrounded by a howling crowd of malcontents, with clods in their grimy hands.

‘Go to church! Go to church!’ they yelled.

Emily behaved with admirable composure, and her good humour was infectious; they let her pass with a laugh. But she drove no more in the Park on Sunday afternoons; the fashionable world had been robbed of one more of its habits by the proletariat, which objected to be made virtuous by law itself, but enjoyed enforcing virtue on others.

England, in 1856, was settling into the happy calm which was presently to be called Victorianism. The debonair Pam, singularly un-Victorian, was Prime Minister, and the Queen, in

spite of tantrums, had to swallow him and his Georgian ways; in her heart, perhaps, she approved them unconsciously, since Mr. Gladstone, whose morals should have charmed her, entirely failed to please. The English world was, perhaps, a little *too* full of improving conversation; Pam's bland humour was a blessed relief. The papas of the pretty, insipid misses, who were drawn so divertingly by Mr. Leech, all swore by Pam, though they must have deplored the early history of Pam's wife, and concealed Georgian antics from their wives and daughters. England as a whole adored her Prime Minister as she has never adored one before or since, though his levity on the subject of Sunday Bands in Parks rather shocked her; Bands *did* rather smack of the Devil, especially on Sunday. It was further whispered in orthodox circles that Lord Palmerston professed never to have heard of the Tractarians, and was quite unaware of the dreadful menace of Popery which hung like a dark cloud over his England. The Prime Minister *was* a little frivolous; still he was 'Pam' and stood for England against all foreigners, which showed that his heart was sound; foreigners, seldom popular in England, were receding further and further into the cold and outer darkness of England's disapproval as she became more and more middle-class.

Georgiana and Emily went to hear their old friend, Mr. Thackeray, lecture on the Four Georges; extremely diverted, Georgiana looked round at pursed lips and prim faces as the shocking antics of those deplorable persons were unfolded.

Had there ever been a time before Victoria? Georgiana was beginning to doubt it.

Happily some aspects of human nature remain static; all England, openly or surreptitiously, enjoyed the Rugeley poisonings and tales of the atrocious Palmer; Georgiana reminded Emily of her old friend Greenacre and nursery games.

Georgiana read as omnivorously as ever, but Emily had grown nice in the matter of books. Mr. Trollope and Mr. Reade

wrote novels suitable for the Grant household, and, of course, Mr. Dickens, whose *Little Dorrit* was hardly up to the *Pickwick* standard but was really an improving tale. Emily, of course, no longer called her kittens after Sam Weller or Serjeant Buzfuz; indeed, kittens had become a faintly improper subject in themselves; cats were so indelicate in their habits. Mr. Tennyson's pretty poems were admitted, but Mr. Browning's shocking lines, one could hardly call them verses, were shut out.

Emily's children were presented by their grandmother with *The Nonsense Book* of Mr. Edward Lear at a little later date. Emily's husband, to whom propriety was becoming a fetish, was not quite sure that it was nice, he suspected Charles Hansike of having recommended it, but when he heard that his political idol, Lord Stanley, 'the Rupert of Debate', who had translated the *Iliad*, had had a share in it, he withdrew his objections.

'Mr. Lear's *Nonsense Book*,' thought Georgiana privately, 'might act like castor oil on little minds surfeited with the Fairchild Family and other moral tales.'

Emily herself took in the *Ladies' Gazette of Fashion* and read the novels of Mr. Thackeray, but she was a little doubtful about the propriety of both; too much attention to dress might be considered frivolous, and Mr. Thackeray was inclined to be too waggish about really serious things, like social distinctions, but the mind trained by Caroline and Georgiana could not wholly divest itself of all their taste and crisp good sense.

London was very gay in 1857, when Emily's second son was born. Louis Napoleon and Eugénie were in England again that year and Emily caught a glimpse of them in the Isle of Wight where she was convalescing. Though there were alarming rumours from India, England was far more interested in young Princess Vicky's betrothal and wedding: 'a genuine love match, my dear'. Georgiana was a little sceptical about love matches, especially in high places, and was sorry for the

poor young girl, exiled too young to a foreign and hostile court; her observations in Germany had not endeared that country to her, and she shared Caroline's love of France.

The year 1859 brought tragedy to Caroline, the first of her life. Sir Timothy, debonair as ever, carrying his years with elegance and ease, was never averse from a new experience; he accepted with pleasure an invitation to be present on the trial trip of the *Great Eastern* steamer (from which the first name of *Leviathan* had been withdrawn because someone had considered it impious to call a ship by a Biblical name). There were a great many guests on the steamer for her trip from Deptford to Portland Roads, the Marquess of Stafford, Lord Alfred Paget, the Earl of Mountcharles, a most distinguished company, a most interesting trip, until, off Beachy Head, there was a terrible explosion and many of the guests were killed, Sir Timothy Grant among them.

For many months it seemed as if Caroline could not rally from the blow, but her natural volatility came to the rescue; she still had Jeremy and quite magnificent health, and a great capacity for enjoyment, when she forgot her husband's fate. She took a trip to New York with Georgiana and Charles, was prodigiously diverted by the *New World*, and very eager to return to the Old. She was back in London in December, 1861, in a London hushed and waiting, for the Prince Consort lay dying and all eyes were turned towards Windsor. Caroline crossed to Paris with relief.

In 1863 Emily presented her husband with a daughter; the Prince of Wales was just married to a pretty princess from Denmark, so they called the child Alexandra. Enforced idleness gave Emily a little time to read - reading was beginning to be considered a shocking waste of time - so unproductive, as if one could not find something *useful* to do! However discouraged, people went on writing books; England was startled just then by a new lady authoress, Miss Mary Elizabeth Bradon, whose *Lady Audley's Secret* shook all classes of society

to their foundations. Emily, a little shocked, nevertheless read it with absorption, and sent it to her mother in New York.

Charles Hansike was, of course, acting as a Special Correspondent during the Civil War. All England sympathized with the South, but events in the North had to be reported. Georgiana was at the Brevoort House in New York, where the bills came to £20 sterling a head, which shocked her. She had just returned from a visit to Montreal, which was full of Confederates and echoes of a most moving song:

Thou wilt not yield the traitor toll,
Maryland, my Maryland.
Thou wilt not crook to his control
Maryland, my Maryland.
Better the fire upon thee roll;
Better the shot, the blade, the bowl,
Than crucifixion of the soul,
Maryland, my Maryland.

Crushed between the passions of two armies, Georgiana failed to appreciate *Lady Audley's Secret* as she should have done.

Emily's seventh child, and second daughter, was born on the day Lord Palmerston died, and was, of course, christened Victoria.

'Isn't seven enough?' asked Aunt Caroline.

Emily looked shocked; was not the size of one's family entirely the will of God? Caroline thought not, and suggested a reading of Mr. Malthus. Emily would not have *that* abomination in her house.

It seemed, nevertheless, that she was resting from her task of replenishing the earth. Tim received his knighthood that year, and the new Lady Grant thought it her duty to entertain on a rather sumptuous scale.

Georgiana had a glimpse of her new granddaughter and looked in at one of Emily's parties, rather splendid in a gown of black velvet, without a crinoline, of course, for the crinoline

was certainly going out. Emily had also discarded her crinoline and looked exquisite in a gown of pale green watered silk with lace flounces looped up with clusters of pink roses; she wore roses, too, in her magnificent dark hair, dressed like the Empress Eugénie's. It was a most brilliant affair, and revealed to Georgiana that the Grants were well up the ladder Emily had chosen to climb. They would not reach the world that had been Caroline's, and in which she had moved in her youth, for the taint of the *bourgeoisie*, as Caroline complained plaintively, was too evident, and, in these times, poor Tim would never be able to live his misfortune down entirely. Silly Emily, who might have had Jeremy and been the genuine article, Lady Grant of Maudline Hall!

'But she could never have *made* Jeremy,' Georgiana pointed out.

Georgiana enjoyed these quiet interludes, but a few days later she was speeding happily to Italy by the Mont Cenis route, remembering how long ago Horace Walpole had lost his little dog there, eaten, under his shocked eyes, by a wolf. It was still a terrible journey, crawling from Lans le Bourg to Susa in a diligence drawn by fourteen or sixteen mules. Napoleon's road was good, though, and at the top was a passable hotel where you got delicious little trout, but the jolting and creaking were shocking and every bone in her body ached.

Charles was to be everywhere at once, but Georgiana journeyed to Venice and was stranded there during its siege by the Austrians, while Garibaldi's hymn was sung under her windows. Charles, she heard, was in the Northern Tyrol with Garibaldi himself and his red shirts, very ragged and sorriously provided.

He reached her side at last, and together, bright eyed, they saw Venice freed.

News nearer home occupied Charles for the next two years; there was the Great Exhibition in Paris, and at home there was 'The Claimant'; who wanted to read about foreign affairs when there was the Tichborne case at home? And then

it was 1870 and all Europe in a state of upheaval once more, and Caroline was dying in Paris, of privation and grief because her world had come to an end.

Caroline had enjoyed the Second Empire; it reminded her of Vienna in the year of Waterloo, as gay and bright, though a rather tinsel variation of the old theme, perhaps. The rhythm was quickening, and life moved to the frothiest of dance music, as it had moved then, but instead of the classical outline it swayed to the crinoline. La Reine Crinoline led the dance, and she and her ladies were painted by Monsieur Winterhalter with the charming artificiality, though perhaps not the skill, of Watteau; they were figures on the lids of chocolate boxes, poised enchantingly for the opening of the ball. There was a mechanical instrument which played the dance music and it had a peculiarly tinkling pretty tune; the ladies of the court danced to it in modes so extravagant that their lives seemed a perpetual masquerade. There was dancing at the Bal Mabille and Valentino's, dancing everywhere, on the left bank and on the right, and the melodies of Monsieur Offenbach provided the accompaniment, both for the exquisite Empress and for Cora Pearl.

Monsieur Offenbach was amusing and witty; he parodied Rossini and Meyerbeer, but he also parodied himself; he fitted his period enchantingly, was tuneful, cheerful, voluble, saucy and never, never serious.

'Ces rois, remplis de vaillance, plis de vaillance, plis de vaillance,' he carolled impudently, and everybody laughed with him.

Paris of the Second Empire was the most amusing place in history, and he, Offenbach, the most diverting of composers. Set it to Music. Could anything be better fun?

Herr Wagner declared that this music was 'a dunghill', but then Paris, which idolized Offenbach, did not care for Herr Wagner, who was hooted out of the town. His *Rienzi* had been tolerable, and all Paris was at the opera one evening in

March 1861, to hear his new piece, full of pilgrims and harsh noises, which the Emperor had sent for from Germany. It was called *Tannhauser*, and everyone agreed with M. Berlioz when he denounced its barbarism. It was all discord, horrible! The Empire wanted to hear no more of such noise.

Paris bloomed like a rose garden with pretty ladies; Monsieur Winterhalter proved to all the world that none but pretty ladies were ever born, and, if Monsieur Gavarni sometimes splashed a little acid on *his* pen, that but added to his piquancy.

There were, of course, objectors to the cheerful chorus, tiresome reforming cranks and round eyed Englishmen with pursed lips, who deplored the abyss which separated Paris from the standards of Victorian England. Caroline, always dutifully in touch with her countrymen, dined one evening in company with the remarkable Mr. Cobden, who had such diverting views on fiscal matters, but Paris, she thought, hardly seemed the place for Mr. Cobden, who appeared almost grotesquely solemn at the Duc de Morny's side.

M. de Morny retained his charm and elegance, and turned as many heads as ever; they called his house '*le petit coin d'amour*'. But de Morny, of course, was not growing younger, was, indeed, feeling his age, and more; he was in his box for the first night of *La Belle Hélène*, but a day or two later it was rumoured that he was not well. Paris saw no more of him, and, soon, the thoughtful (there were not many of them) shook their heads and decided that the Empire was not the same since Morny's death.

It seemed as gay as ever; Moustachu was still popular, but opinions grew more sharply divided about La Reine Crinoline. Did she not lead her husband *too* completely by the nose? It was a question one could not ask Napoleon, who still wore an enigmatic air.

The Exhibition brought all the world to Paris. Caroline, delighted to have Georgiana with her, and Jeremy, and Emily's Albert, and, of course, Charles, entertained on a grand scale.

She promised her guests the most wonderful time they had ever had in their lives, and very nobly redeemed the promise, at least from a dramatic and musical point of view. They heard Carvalho sing 'Juliet' in Monsieur Gounod's new opera, and compared it with Patti's 'Lucia'. They saw Taglioni, of course, and Ristori as Queen Elizabeth, and heard the impudent Thérèse sing 'C'est dans l'nez qu'ça me chatouille'. They hummed the music of *Orphée aux Enfers*, and, as a grand finale, saw Hortense Schneider in *La Grande Duchesse de Gerolstein*. All Paris was set to music; all feet were jigging to the pretty tunes.

The Kings of Europe drove down the boulevards and glittered in their opera boxes. *How* it reminded Caroline of 1815! There was a royalty from Sweden, and one from Japan, the Czar, the Prince of Wales, the Sultan in red tarbush; King William came from Berlin with his Chancellor in attendance. The famous *cocottes* drove in the Bois, Nana with her scarlet liveries and the lovely Cora Pearl.

Caroline in her box with all her party pointed out the big Bismarck as he sat laughing at the *Grande Duchesse de Gerolstein*, in a benign mood, relaxing as completely as his master. Impressive, but not like Metternich, Caroline considered.

So fine an occasion required a military review, of course, and on a June day at Longchamps Louis Napoleon sat on his horse and in company with the Czar and the King of Prussia watched his troops go by, still to music, bright coloured and glittering like comic opera soldiers, in green and red, and blue and gold. As they drove back to Paris a pistol cracked at the Czar; it was only a drum tap in the operetta. The year of the Exhibition was a glittering success. The *tempo* of the music quickened a little; faster, faster tinkled the little tunes; all Europe had joined in the dance, as it had danced at the Congress in Vienna, but Prussia, now, seemed to be dancing to a tune of her own; while the rest of the world circled languorously to the valse

tunes of Strauss and Waldteufel, Prussia seemed to be moving to a military air.

The echo of the Exhibition gaiety seemed to linger still in 1870, though it was growing fainter, and there were one or two discordant notes. Caroline's friend, Lord Clarendon, for instance, seemed a trifle worried, and produced an odd and diverting scheme of disarmament. Prussia was even more amused at this than France was, but as Lord Clarendon died that year no more was heard of his joke.

Caroline began to feel her age that spring, but not enough to miss any diversion; she was extremely entertained by Georgiana's stories of the Claimant, which still convulsed the world. She was wryly amused, too, by the antics of Jeremy's wife, who always reminded her of Emily, the crust of Emily, prim and insipid, without the fires which burned below, and without, alas, Emily's fruitfulness, since she was still childless after fourteen years of marriage. His mother could have shaken Jeremy for his cheerfulness over his wife's affectation of ill health; she could bear children as well as any other woman if he insisted, she said. But Jeremy did not mind; he had made the eldest of Tim and Emily's sons his heir, and was quite content that the newly created Lord Grant should take the territorial name of Maudline, for Emily, looking down her nose primly at any mention of the Offenbach Empire, had pushed her husband up the ladder to a peerage, and was Lady Grant of Maudline, a pious, sober matron, while her mother and her aunt still tapped their toes frivolously at the sound of dance music, and grew excited over operas and plays. Such a bad example for the young people! Alex was wild to go to school in Paris; all her children were for humming catchy Paris tunes.

And then, in a moment, the Offenbach operette was over; the streets of Paris were full of soldiers shouting 'À Berlin. A Berlin'. At the Opera, instead of the 'Duchesse', they were singing the Marseillaise. The Emperor was at Sedan, and

Eugénie had left France. Like a pricked bubble the Second Empire spluttered and collapsed to a philosophic murmur of:

'Et cependant, pendant dix-huit ans nous nous sommes diablement amusés.'

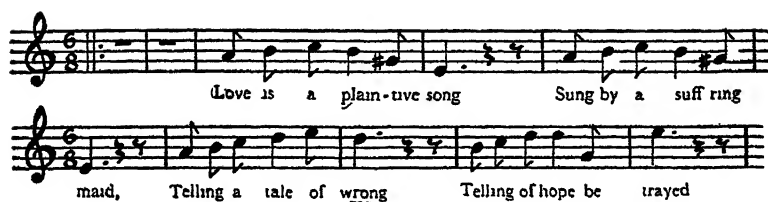
Caroline, bewildered, angry, set her lips firmly and refused to follow the fugitives. She was too old to be uprooted, she protested; but she was, in fact, too loyal, for she discovered at last that under her gay frivolity she cherished a great passion; more than her husband, more than her sister, more even than Jeremy, she had loved France.

She caught a chill, went hungry, was confined to her bed and rose again from it indomitably. Paris was full, once more, of Prussian soldiers, far too many of them, as the Duke had told her in 1815, with laurels in their hats.

Georgiana, able to reach her at last, was just in time to see her die, cheerful and courageous as she had always been, and with her, for Georgiana, the eighteenth century and her own taste for adventure came to an end. For the first time since her second marriage she longed for a settled home.

MAUD

Gilbert and Sullivan: *Patience*



Love is a plaintive song,
Sung by a suff'ring maid,
Telling a tale of wrong,
Telling of hope betrayed.

CHAPTER I

THE Grants' eighth, and, as it turned out, youngest, child arrived prematurely during Georgiana's absence in France. Emily, usually so collected, was engulfed by a wave of fear and cried out constantly for her mother; Tim was distracted; the house was filled with consternation and a thousand small confusions when Mrs. Hansike at last arrived. Emily was out of danger by that time, and the seven-months baby, a girl, after some hesitation, had decided to take hold of life, but the sudden alarming peep into chaos, from their hitherto matter-of-course security, had alarmed them all.

'Thank heaven you have come,' said a shaken Tim.

'Now grandmamma is here everything will be all right,' whispered a cluster of frightened children on an upper landing, peeping through the banisters.

The house steadied, the shrieking wheels slipped once more into well oiled harmony; Emily's almost hysterical embrace ended in a sigh of deep content.

'Oh mamma, I am so glad you are back. Poor dear Aunt Caroline. How sad that I shall never see her again.'

'She sent her love to you and Tim,' Georgiana said gently, but she did not tell her that half in malice, half in kindness Caroline had altered her will, saying 'Now Jeremy has adopted Tim's eldest boy I'll provide for Emily's daughters, so that they need not be always under her thumb'; she had left them £300 a year each with the genuine, but naughty, hope that it would enable them to enjoy themselves.

'Dear Aunt Caroline,' Emily said again after a pause. 'Tell me about Paris, mamma.'

Georgiana told her, and repeated a score of tales about Louis Napoleon and Eugénie's flight from France. Emily

listened with closed eyes. This turned back a page she had finished, and caused an old wound to throb; illness had robbed her of the bright hard surface which covered the self which only her mother and Aunt Caroline had ever seen. She knew her mother well enough to be sure that this was the last time she would hear of it; it was the end of a chapter for them both.

Georgiana was thinking of Caroline's legacy and the way in which it might affect the lives of her granddaughters. The Married Women's Property Act was just about to be passed, though it would not come into operation just yet. Georgiana was vastly entertained at it, though she thought ruefully of the difference it would have made in her life if Arthur had not been able to gamble with her money. Emily, of course, nominally had no property; it all belonged to her husband; she did not possess a cheque book, and had to ask her husband for every penny which she spent. He paid all her bills; he kept her bank book and gave her an allowance, smaller than she had asked for but larger than she needed, since she knew her Tim. It was all bluff, of course; as long as she kept his affection, she was absolute mistress of her house and him. In theory Georgiana was equally subservient to Charles, but in fact, as all their intimates knew, Georgiana was the purse bearer, for Charles had no head for figures. But while she laughed at the difference between appearance and reality, Georgiana knew the inherent weakness of their position; one of her granddaughters might marry another Arthur Quisite, so that she had lent herself very willingly to Caroline's posthumous thrust; Tim and Emily were to have no control over the money and when the girls came of age the new law would be in operation and they would be equally independent of their husbands. How Caroline had regretted that she would not be able to watch the piquant situation!

Emily broke the long silence. 'Mamma, will you do something for me?' she asked in a low tone. She slipped her hand

under her pillow and brought out a bunch of keys. 'This one,' she said, 'unlocks my wardrobe. There is a box there, at the back, quite hidden, will you take it away with you and burn it. I do not want to keep it. I cannot destroy it myself, and I cannot trust anyone but you.'

Georgiana found the box, a pretty cardboard one such as she had seen in dozens of the arms of *midinettes*, marked with the name of Caroline's dressmaker. She hid the box under her cloak with no other comment than 'Certainly, my love'.

The nurse came in, a superior young person and an ardent disciple of Miss Nightingale.

'You should be asleep, Lady Grant,' she said, smiling.

'Oh, but I'm not tired. I feel ever so much better.'

The nurse realized as she examined her patient that it was true, that this visitor need not be dismissed; she had brought tranquillity and healing where there had been fretfulness and pain. They talked of the old days and the 'Sairey Gamps' who had been drawn so amusingly by Mr. Dickens, and of the new chloroform which the Queen had brought into fashion and which spared women so much agony, and of Miss Nightingale and the great work she had begun. Princess Christian, too, assisted by some of the matrons of the big London hospitals, had just inaugurated the British Nurses' Association for better training; child-bearing, in future, would not be nearly so perilous a task.

'A very agreeable young woman,' said Georgiana when the nurse had gone to fetch the baby. She mused, as she often did, upon the changing world. There were a great many improvements, but she did not feel at all happy about this new Education Bill which Mr. Forster was bringing in, unsettling, she was afraid it would prove to be.

A housemaid came in to make up the fire.

'You will have tea with me here, mamma?'

'Of course, my dear.'

It was a pleasant room, Georgiana thought, as she sat in the firelight and Emily dozed, not as pretty as it had been in her mother's time when the gilt dressing table and *bergère*, empire bed and Aubusson carpet, and walls of pale green silk had given it an air of delicate brightness which the modern style of decoration entirely lacked. She disliked this heavy mahogany furniture, plush chairs, cabbage rose wallpaper and ornate decoration, it was heavy and dark and left no room to move; all the same, by firelight, it was still a pleasant room.

Emily had consigned most of the old fashioned furniture to the attics. In consideration for her mother's feelings she had left the drawing-rooms untouched, explaining this eccentricity to her guests as a 'period room', 'so delightfully old fashioned', but the rest of the house was modern, furnished in the best mid-Victorian taste. Georgiana could not admire it and decided that her new house should be furnished from the attics of her old one; she would rescue her mother's satinwood and her own Sheraton and Chippendale from the cobwebs and dust; it might be old fashioned, as Emily said, but somehow she preferred it to her daughter's fashionable mahogany and plush, as she preferred her Rose du Barry china to the modern stuff.

She liked this old house; it held agreeable memories, and she loved the square. She looked across it at Number 50 which Emily's children always called 'the haunted house'; dreadful stories were told of it, and after dusk they hurried by with fearful peeps and suddenly averted eyes and throbbing hearts, as a will o' the wisp light flickered in an upper window.

'No one has ever been seen to come out,' they whispered fearfully. Georgiana smiled to herself; she had often seen old Mr. Myers come out in the past and supposed that nothing worse than eccentricity determined his present mode of life.

'Tim and I must look for another house, mamma,' said

Emily suddenly as if she had caught the reflection of her mother's thought. 'Of course now you are going to stay in London you will want your own.'

Georgiana was startled. 'Oh no, my love. What a dreadful idea. This is much too large for us. Charles has seen a house in Soho Square which he thinks will suit us very well, very convenient for Fleet Street, so that he can walk home when the weather is fine.'

'And servants, mamma?'

'Charles has an old acquaintance, a soldier whom he helped at Sebastopol, and who not only worships him but is married to an excellent cook with two grown daughters; it will be quite a family affair, and free, one hopes, from disputations.'

'You always inspired fervent passions in servants.'

'Oh not nearly such fervent passions as Charles does.'

Emily moved impatiently - Charles, Charles, it was always Charles.

'This is your home, mamma. We ought not to deprive you of it.'

'You don't as long as I may sit here when I wish. This room is full of memories, Emily. I can still see my mother on a winter afternoon, just like this, sitting in her high backed chair in the firelight and listening to a song. Very odd, that was. I have never fathomed it.' She told her daughter of the singer on the stairs, who had not been there when the door was opened. Emily was interested but sceptical.

'Imagination, mamma, or a servant downstairs.'

'Perhaps.' She could not dismiss it so surely, for she, too, had heard the singer come upstairs.

A red-cheeked nursemaid brought in the baby, and Georgiana took it on her lap. The child was very small, but having decided to live was setting about it sturdily. One tiny hand like a crumpled rose petal was curled about her finger as Georgiana asked 'What is she to be called?'

'Maud, we thought.'

'Oh! Tennyson will have a lot to answer for to this generation.'

She hummed softly the song which Sims Reeves had recently made famous:

'Come into the garden, Maud,
For the black bat night has flown.'

The baby opened her eyes, enormous eyes like bluebells under water, lovely but misty. Georgiana felt an icy grip at her heart.

'Is the child quite all right, Emily?'

'Oh, quite, mamma, not even very delicate now she has made a start.'

'Eyes quite all right?' Georgiana asked casually.

'Of course. Why what . . . ' Georgiana heard a rising note of alarm. 'Nothing, my love. I fancied a squint but it is only the wind.'

Emily, reassured, dozed once more. Georgiana watched the child with a terrified intensity. But when she asked nurse and doctor they both laughed at her and assured her that there was nothing wrong.

They must know, of course, but in the night she awoke shivering at the memory of the terrible moment when she had imagined that the child was blind. She could not sleep again, and rising lit the gas and looked round her shelves for a book. The box which she had brought away from Berkeley Square caught her eyes. She hesitated. Was she to look, or to burn it unopened? Emily's clear look had held a confidence and conveyed a message, the answer to a question was in that box, and, almost certainly, her daughter had meant her to know that answer.

She lifted the lid. Inside was folded the Winterhalter gown in which Emily had sat for her portrait and which she had worn to the Tuileries on the night of the Emperor's first ball. Rustling under her fingers, the folds of silk and lace told Georgiana the

girl's secret. She had gone radiant to that public rendezvous with the Emperor; he had chosen her, her heart sang, he would tell her so when he led her out for the cotillion. But he had chosen her for his mistress, not his wife and Empress.

Emily could never bear to look upon the gown again.

CHAPTER II

MAUD, it turned out, was only short sighted, but her grandmother's fear for her had given the child a place in her heart which her brothers and sisters had never held, so that the little girl spent more time in Soho Square or at King's Wimborne than she did with her parents. This arrangement suited everybody, particularly Georgiana and Maud.

The house in Soho Square, with its elegant eighteenth-century air and furniture, and a master and mistress who cared very little for convention or fashion, was an extraordinarily pleasant one. Charles knew everyone, and everyone wanted to know Georgiana. She had never cared for Society and she did not care for it now, but, although she went out very little, she was less enamoured of solitude, and was pleased to entertain at home. Her Sunday afternoons were famous, everyone who was anyone begging for an introduction to Mrs. Hansike, but of the many who came few were chosen to join the circle of her intimate friends who were bidden at other times: an invitation to supper on Sunday was the most coveted prize in the only section of Society for which she cared. Society in London was still small and narrow, and appallingly well-bred; a 'lion' might enter its drawing-rooms to be inspected, but hardly a 'lioness', and such creatures were regarded with much the same curiosity as the animals at the Zoo. England was still divided very firmly into the classes and the masses, and snobbery informed all their ways; 'brains' were the passport to Georgiana's drawing-room but not to Emily's. Tim, never having had a superfluity of them, distrusted brains.

'Character,' he said heavily 'was what mattered most.' Cleverness was a very dubious asset, quite impermissible in

anyone under twenty, and only to be approved in moderation at a later age.

His four elder sons, amiable young men with good looks and good manners, gave him very little cause for anxiety. If they sowed wild oats they did so with extreme discretion; if they were tainted with cleverness they kept it from their parents' ken. They were fond of their mother and admired her, tactfully concealing their knowledge of the real power she wielded under a dutiful acceptance of her perpetual 'Papa knows best'.

The question of their careers was early settled. Land and the funds were still the only socially recognized form of wealth, but careers in politics and the services were permissible; a young man, with influence, might enter the Foreign Office, or, if he liked study, might be called to the Bar; if he showed signs of being odd he might even enter the church, but that was the limit of elasticity; Bankers were a distinct descent in the social scale; doctors, solicitors, merchants, were placed still lower - artists, except Sir Frederick Leighton, were very odd fish, and all authors except Mr. Tennyson; they might roar at fashionable dinner tables but not purr more intimately. Lord Grant, having delivered his opinion on careers in general, chose his sons' for them; Albert, as his Uncle Jeremy's heir, had enough to do as a potential landowner; George, having done well at Oxford, was to follow his father to the Bar; Jerry, with a streak of queerness, had better go into the church, whilst Timothy was obviously meant for politics.

There remained Frank, and Frank was a very much greater problem than the girls, for Frank and his sisters were all rebels against the established order of things, though it was not until the late 'eighties that Lord Grant realized that his daughters had aided and abetted Frank. The boy had caused trouble very early by announcing that he desired to join the Church of Rome. Lord Grant was horrified - 'I trust that I am behind none,' he said pompously, 'in my desire to keep my precious children from the smallest taint of Popery.' Frank, reluctantly

giving up the Roman Church, became an agnostic and talked wittily of Socialism, had a violent admiration for Whistler, and read Baudelaire. His father, very seriously alarmed, had removed him from school, and, having kept him under his own eye for a year while he was crammed by an impeccable tutor - at least, by a tutor with an impeccable reputation - sent him up to Oxford to recover enough faith to join his brother Jerry in the fold of the Established Church. Frank, however, joined Mr. Ruskin's band of undergraduates whose sympathy for the working man took the form of making roads, intermittently, while Mr. Ruskin himself supervised this labour of devotion in a top hat. Frank and his sister Alex were very much taken with socialism in general and particularly with William Morris's 'castles in Spain', where spotless artisans dwelt in fairy cottages and laboured at exquisite crafts.

Georgiana listened while Alex expounded these impractical ideas, and then read Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* to her granddaughter, who found that kind of knowledge very difficult to digest.

Since he enjoyed himself at Oxford Frank managed to conceal the fact that the University was not having quite the effect upon him which his father expected. There had recently been a young man named Wilde who had called himself 'Professor of Aesthetics and Critic of Art', and had achieved the distinction of disciples. 'Give me the luxuries,' he had said, 'and anyone can have the necessities.'

This was Frank's mood when Mr. Ruskin's earnest teaching palled, but, in his spare time, he read obediently for the Church.

The boy's only confidant at home was his sister Alex, two years his junior. Alex had wanted to go to school in Paris, and had persuaded her mother to persuade her father; success seemed in sight, when Lord Grant made cautious inquiries of other parents, which left such a bad impression on his mind that he gave up the half formed plan to send Alex and Vicky to France; the taint of Popery and frivolity still lingered in

Parisian air, he found, although the Emperor was dead. Alex, who wanted to study art but had wisely refrained from mentioning the fact to anyone but Frank, could not conceal her disappointment.

'But why, mamma,' she wailed, 'both you and papa spent most of your youth in France without being corrupted. 'Control yourself, my child,' said Emily sternly, 'don't be impertinent. It is not a question upon which you could have any opinion. Papa knows best.'

Alex controlled herself, since she had had a good deal of experience in the art, but at the first opportunity she rushed off to her grandmother. Georgiana was always finding herself in these embarrassing situations. She sympathized with her granddaughter but gave her no encouragement.

'It is entirely a question for your father to decide, Alex,' she said kindly. 'Protests are not only useless but foolish; never make them except on matters of principle. It cannot be for the sake of principle that you want to go to Paris.' 'No,' Alex acknowledged. Georgiana waited. Alex had a profound distrust of all adults, but presently the whole story of her ambition came tumbling out.

'Ah'. This was more serious than a young girl's whim, or vanity, or emulation. 'Wait, Alex,' she said gently. 'When you are eighteen, if you are of the same mind, come to me again, but in the meantime give up talking of it, even thinking of it if you can.'

'Eighteen,' said Alex bitterly, as if it meant a hundred years of waiting, instead of two.

'On Sunday,' said Georgiana calmly 'I expect a famous artist here. I will ask your mother if you may come to tea. You will not like him; he is quite a bear.' Alex brightened; she would catch a whiff of paint. She was extremely shy when she met this great Mr. Whistler; he had such very strange ideas; he admired Chinese porcelain and Japanese prints. He went about the world, she knew, preaching new schemes of decoration and

another renaissance of art; this, of course, was wonderful, but his white lock of hair, his American accent, his abominable manners and caustic wit made up a very alarming lion for a drawing-room – Alex began to feel that perhaps she was rather young to be an artist. At eighteen she might not feel so bewildered by this roar, and might be less childish and gauche. In bed she invented all the witty comments which she might have made, and submitted with a better grace to her mother's system of education, which was, Georgiana thought, a harsh one. The process of hardening and bracing which children underwent certainly seemed to make them strong. They had cold water to wash in and broke the ice on their baths in the winter before they plunged in; only on Saturday nights could they look forward to the delight of a hot bath. They had a warm frock each for the winter, and another, equally plain, into which to change; in the summer they had two thinner ones. Grandmamma, conscious of the shortcomings of their appearance, sent each girl a pretty frock at Christmas time, although mamma disapproved and murmured something about 'Making them vain'. They had porridge for breakfast, a good plain midday dinner, bread and butter and warm milk for tea, and the day was divided into lessons, tasks and exercise. Emily taught them herself for some years, and was a stern, inexorable tutor. Their education was confined principally to the three R's, a good deal of history, elementary geography and science, a great deal of scripture and long passages of poetry to be learned by heart. Alex, like Vicky, had few children's books, and it was not until she was fifteen that she was given permission to read *Waverley*, though she had borrowed it from Frank years ago and hidden it under her mattress.

Alex and Vicky were both jealous of Maud, who spent so much time with grandmamma and had been given an enthralling book called *The Water Babies*, and another called *Alice in Wonderland*, and all Mr. Lear's books of Nonsense

Rhymes, which were kept in Soho Square. Maud sat on a stool with her books while grandmamma worked. On a table beside her was the rosewood workbox which seemed to contain an unlimited number of amusing china elephants and beads which could be strung, as well as grandmamma's embroidery or crochet. Unlike mamma, grannie did not take her needlework *too* seriously, Maud suspected; certainly she did not regard reading as a complete waste of time. Where mamma was always in a fidget, grandmamma was still. She sat tranquilly in the high backed chair which had been her mother's, and, instead of making little girls jump up instantly to fetch and carry, stretched out her lazy-tongs to pull things towards her; a fascinating instrument, Maud found those lazy-tongs, though she pinched her fingers in them. A little later Whistler painted Mrs. Hansike in her great carved chair with her workbox and her tongs and a solemn child at her feet; a portrait which hung beside the one Lawrence had painted of her in her radiant youth, and the Whistler was undoubtedly the more gracious portrait.

They had tea together, with toasted muffins and sometimes sponge cake, and then Charles, who was not grandpapa but was much nicer than anyone else's grandpapa could possibly be, would come in with a hug for grandmamma and one for Maud, and often two or three gentlemen, and then they would all talk a great deal, and the quaint little girl might understand as much of it as she could. It was generally about politics or art or the theatre and as she grew older the child learned a surprising amount.

There was a great deal going on in the 'seventies; the theatre, in the competent hands of the Bancrofts, was struggling out of the pit, literature was teeming with new ideas, and art came into its own. There was a good deal of money flowing into the pockets of artists luckier than poor struggling Constable had been, good sound artists whose pictures were hung on the line at Burlington House and were much admired by the

Grants and their friends, though less, to Vicky's surprise, by grandmamma. There were Sir Edwin Landseer's stags in Scotch mist and Mr. Davis's highland cattle in heather, Mr. Briton Rivière's sheep and Mr. Ernest Crofts' battle pieces, Mr. Alma Tadema's marble benches complete with maids and men and blue, blue sea, quite charming, as were the English tea-parties beneath ivied walls; Mr. Poynter's maidens were as engrossed with drapery as Mr. Marcus Stone's were with letters: Mr. Herkomer provided portraits of celebrities, and there was, of course, the picture of the year by Mr. Leighton, all very sound work indeed, with sea that really looked like sea and fauna that undoubtedly resembled real fauna, and which would admirably fill that empty square upon the dining-room wall.

Emily always found the Academy pictures, in her fashionable phrases, 'very powerful' or 'perfectly sweet'. Her mother used different phrases, and hers were 'substantial' and 'sugary', but though they differed on the subject of 'the masters', they were agreed about the rebels; Emily, nourished on Winterhalter and Leighton, thought that the present was the golden age of art, but Georgiana had a passion for Botticelli and a warm admiration for Leonardo and Sir Joshua, and sighed because she feared all golden ages were over long ago.

Though she did not care for Pre-Raphaelite pictures and thought the brotherhood's list of noble names had sad gaps - she had heard Burne-Jones say contemptuously 'Sir Sploshua' in front of the Reynolds' portrait of her mother - Georgiana was interested in the brotherhood and its aims; 'moral beauty' and 'elevating thought' were excellent provided they did not become sanctimonious, but she was obliged to confess that she found them tedious. William Morris's more practical ideas, however, delighted her; there was no doubt in her mind that the mid-century furniture had been deplorable and, though she did not propose to substitute Morris's designs for her own eighteenth-century satinwoods and brocades, she hoped that

Emily might be bitten with the new craze and discard a little of her mahogany and plush.

Her hopes were fulfilled. The new ideas became a kind of religion with the highly cultured, and Emily, as she grew older, was beginning to prefer culture to fashion; it was less fatiguing to be draped in flowing stuffs than to be laced into one's stays. 'Nature,' as Oscar Wilde remarked so wittily, 'had elbowed her way into the charmed circle of art,' and the willowy ladies of Burne-Jones began to stare at the voluptuous beauties of Rosetti in the streets of London as well as on the walls of the New Gallery. Ladies drooped, and draped themselves in stuffs from Liberty's, and gazed out pensively at a jeering unaesthetic world, reflected very amusingly by Mr. Du Maurier in the pages of *Punch*.

Emily, driven to aestheticism by a growing distaste for stays, was followed very enthusiastically by her naturally willowy daughters, who found no difficulty in draping themselves over chairs in Burne-Jones attitudes, though Vicky's hair *would* curl in a most unaesthetic manner, a vivid mass of tight little red gold curls which insisted on rioting over her pretty head in a wild ungolden-stairish way.

The fashion suited Alex much better; her hair was smooth and the authentic Burne-Jones red. She had not lost her ambition to study art but her mother's approval of the new fashion assisted the girl's sulky acquiescence in being exhibited in the matrimonial market. For wealthy young landowners, who only showed themselves in London for a month or two in the year and then acquired great dexterity in avoiding maternal hooks, the sulky-sweet, remote Burne-Jones damsel had a curious attraction; she did not angle for them; at once they began to angle for her. It was - as her grandmother but no one else perceived - a disastrous affair when Alex, at seventeen, was married to a robust young gentleman from the shires who thought he admired a picture but in fact only really liked to put his leg across a horse.

'What,' Georgiana asked Emily, 'will Alex do, buried in the country eleven months in the year with a man who has no conversation but of stables, and smells of them!'

Emily protested that it was a very good match and that both Alex and Oliver were in love. They were, but how long would it last? Georgiana asked herself regretfully, with young people who had no single quality to share except youth.

It lasted, in fact, two years. Alex hated the country passionately; Oliver loathed the town. She drooped in her boudoir in her flowing Burne-Jones gowns, while Oliver hunted the fox, kept a mistress in the next village and journeyed to London or Paris for an occasional spree on the grand scale. Alex was enraged, bored and humiliated: at the end of the second year she ran away.

A few years earlier this could have been dealt with in the simplest fashion, but the Married Women's Property Act was working now, and Caroline's kind, maliciously bestowed, modest competency enabled Alex to snap her fingers at them all: she cared nothing for social ostracism; she would go to Paris and study art. Her brother Frank upheld her, but everyone else stormed or entreated. Grandmamma said 'Give him another chance'. Charles said, with kindly cynicism, 'You're a sensible girl, Alex, make terms with him for yourself and shut your eyes to what cannot be stopped.' Emily was first speechless, then incoherent with anger. Alex's rebellion was crushed, however, by her father who, grieved as well as horrified, stooped to beg.

'One more chance then, papa, but only one and on my own terms. Six months in the year away from him or I won't answer for what may happen.'

Oliver, no more anxious for a scandal than the Grants were, and completely cured of his infatuation for a picture, decided that as long as she preserved appearances he would get along very well with the six months' absence of his wife. 'She will

have children and settle down,' said her father with pathetic optimism.

That hope was unfulfilled, and it was not, at nineteen and with Alex's ardent temperament and her husband's amorous one, an arrangement which was at all likely to work. For three years Alex kept to her bargain, enjoying herself in her own aesthetic but quite reputable way in London for six months of the year, and then dutifully departing to be bored but obliging for six months in the country.

It was Oliver who broke the bargain. There was not one mistress, to whose existence Alex had resolved to shut her eyes, but a series of them. With no confidant but her brother, Alex instituted divorce proceedings, took lodgings with Frank in Chelsea, and waited for the storm to break.

It was, as she had anticipated, a terrific one: without Frank she would not have weathered it, but with him behind her she stood firm. The case was a *cause célèbre*, and caused a tremendous sensation: among the well-bred such things simply were not done. She won her case, of course, but at the cost of social ostracism: her friends cut her, her father shut his door; her sisters were forbidden to communicate with her; her world was destroyed, and it hurt bitterly.

Georgiana and Charles, of course, were kind, but she knew that they deplored her action, and thought it precipitate and uncontrolled. She cried out that her situation had been intolerable. 'Much that seems intolerable at nineteen, my dear, is found quite bearable at twenty-five,' said Georgiana. Alex remembered hearing rumours of her grandfather's behaviour which must have called for a good deal of endurance on the part of his wife. But why, because one generation had suffered in silence, should it impose silent suffering on the next? It was a code, of course, inevitable when woman had no rights, but now, when the air was singing with woman's fight for freedom, it was a code which appeared ludicrous and in need of breaking, Alex said. 'The habits of one generation always

seem ludicrous to the next, as does its appearance,' said Georgiana, and Alex, much to her surprise, found that her grandmother, advanced as she was, deplored the lack of reticence among young people. There had been a good deal of free talk, even broad talk, in her own youth, she said; one might discuss one's neighbours' sins with great freedom, but *personal* revelations were exceedingly ill-bred. Of course there was scandal – there always would be scandal – but one did not reveal in public the wrongdoings of one's husband or one's wife; however blatant the scandal might be, however vividly thrust under one's eyes, one blandly assumed a complete blindness in public: good breeding demanded a complete unconsciousness of what everybody knew. But these modern young people wailed their griefs aloud; it was indecent; it was intolerable. Alex, receiving her lesson in the accepted code too late to profit by it, decided that it was the only subject on which her mother and her grandmother thought exactly alike; they were agreed that women must bear everything rather than take public steps to end a situation which might appear unbearable but which could in fact, with fortitude, be borne, but while Georgiana counselled a bland assumption of blindness to well-known facts, Emily denied with horror that the facts existed on any considerable scale; infidelity, she protested, was as rare among men as among women, that is to say, very rare indeed. Georgiana raised her eyebrows and revealed a little more of the code; reserve, of course, was not binding on men: *they* might shout their woes to all the world.

Emily cried out at that. Grandmamma, she protested, was a little too tolerant, a little cynical indeed. Things had been different in her youth, Georgiana acknowledged, altogether laxer: she had, of course, grown up among heavy drinkers, and though she had long felt a distaste for drunkenness she did not regard it as sinful, merely as a bad habit of conviviality, or as a consoling one in trouble. Neither did she throw stones

at sexual irregularities, though she had come, with maturity, to look coldly on women with good husbands who took lovers on the sly: but for a man to have a mistress was quite in order: a man could be a good man and a devout Christian even with a second household; but only with a second. She *did* deplore promiscuity and wild-oat sowing for any but the very young.

Emily, audibly distressed by all this conversation, which pulled away so many comfortable veils and declared the shams of her 'best of all possible worlds', cried out again at this.

'Purity is essential in every Christian household.'

'The Christian Virtues,' said Georgiana with firmness, 'are kindness and wise tolerance.'

Alex was not in a mood to agree with either of them, but, even in her woe, she had a pleasant perception of how her grandmother's lax subversive doctrine would have made papa swoon. Papa had, at first, forbidden this interview, but Emily had begged for one last word with her erring child, in order to endeavour to turn her thoughts, in expiation, to good works. Grandmamma, fortunately, dealt very simply with that. 'You have made your bed, Alex. Get as much comfort in it as you can: don't fill it with pins!'

Emily took an emotional farewell of her daughter: Georgiana invited the girl to stay with her as long as she wished. But Alex very soon perceived that it wouldn't do. She was a social outcast even among her grandmother's women friends. She spent a few unhappy months at the Slade School of Art, and then decided to join Frank in France.

It was a desperate step and she shrank from the ordeal of facing so new, so strange, so disorderly a life alone; for Frank, she knew, would not stay with her: he was a wanderer, with the lust for change and adventure in his blood: after a month or two, at most a year or two, she must inevitably do without him. The prospect shook her courage, but, as her grandmother said, her bed was made: she must find such comfort in it as she

could, and Paris, Bohemian Paris, was more likely to provide that than London.

It was unfortunate, Georgiana thought, that Alex's distaste for marriage should have coincided with Frank's distaste for the Church: they had supported each other in rebellion. Frank, the rascal, was likely to fall on his feet, but the only hope she could see for Alex was that the girl might really prove to be an artist and carve a bright future for herself; then, and not till then, would she be forgiven.

'God bless you, my dear,' she said with feeling, when she saw her granddaughter off. 'Make a success of life, Alex, and prove that you were right. Charles and I will come over to see you later in the year. You will, I daresay, like Paris, but I don't care for it for long nowadays. All the shop windows seem intent on immorality, full of Leda and Danaë and other ladies in their birthday suits, and the French papers are full of minor blasphemies. Still, you are a rebel and may like it.'

'Oh, grandmamma,' said Alex, with difficulty holding back her tears, 'you are a *born* rebel; it seems to have been forced on me.'

CHAPTER III

ALEX settled down to her new life; she was, it appeared, a genuine artist on a minuscule scale, and life for her was still bearable even after Frank sailed for Australia in search of gold. She was not forgiven, but neither was she punished; the punishment for her misdemeanour fell on Vicky and Maud. Kindness and charity, it appeared, would bear no strain; one sinner in a family presupposed others; the younger girls, it was felt, were likely to turn out as flighty as their sister. There was a curious bigotry in her daughter's generation, Georgiana found, sometimes carried to absurd lengths. An intimate friend of Emily's, for instance, had signed that petition which was presented to the United States by a group which entertained strong religious objections to the use of oil, and prayed that a stop might be put to the irreverent and irreligious proceedings of certain people who were drawing petroleum from the bowels of the earth and thus checking the designs of the Almighty who had stored it there, without a doubt, for the last day, when all things should be destroyed.

Emily, while thinking this extreme, was still in favour of some such steps, and Tim was growing very bigoted indeed. His children had always been in awe of him and had fled precipitately when the unfailing 'Run away, children' came harshly from his mouth, but since Alex's disaster they had grown frightened of him; when he said 'Run away' it was in a tone of intense dislike. And he put a ban on the simplest pleasures: life for children, he seemed to think, should be occupied entirely with work and prayer.

His daughter's disgrace had completed the work which the realization of the handicap of his own illegitimacy had begun: like a cancer the twin griefs ate into him, and poisoned all

their lives. Emily wore an anxious air when she thought herself unwatched, and her mother wondered with misgiving, whether she regretted her work: if she had left Tim to jog along as a moderately successful barrister he would have remained the undistinguished, agreeable man that he had been in his youth, but she had driven him beyond his ability, to a point where all his honours turned sour because they were rooted, to his fantastically puritan mind, in dishonour. The poison seeped into his daily life, and Emily, who, for her own purposes, had created the legend of a benevolent tyrant, found him a tyrant indeed, and without benevolence. If only Alex - ah well, it was not her way to cry over spilt milk: she must make the best of things and improve them when this business of Alex had blown over.

Emily, having achieved her position by her own efforts, was a little dazzled by the heights, but always conscious of her own dignity, whereas her mother's dignity was so essential a part of her that she was quite unconscious of it. Emily thought it due to her position to have her doings chronicled in the Press; Georgiana thought such publicity vulgar, and though she said very little she not only shunned it for herself, but persuaded Charles to take some trouble to see that she was not mentioned in the newspapers. Emily liked to find herself among the 'Professional Beauties', one of the superb and fashionable creatures at whom cameras always clicked, to see whose carriage pass the curious would scramble up on chairs; it was homage to her beauty, still superb in spite of her age, but it had an additional savour from the sweet knowledge that her beauty might have passed unnoticed had she not raised it to eminence by her wits. She was a 'climber' and while she secretly exulted in her own skill, her mother winced at it. Georgiana had no need to make feverish efforts to secure 'lions': they came affectionately for the pleasure of eating out of her hand, of savouring, among her faded chintzes, tranquillity and wit; they clamoured to know *her*, but they would

not go to her daughter's brilliant parties without a great deal of coaxing.

Emily was still ruthless. She wanted to manage everything for everybody, and though she would always do her best to get her friends what they wanted, if she approved of those wants, she would set about it in her own way. She was, under her deceptive air of demureness, arrogant and imperious, and the better you knew her, the less this demureness deceived. People were afraid of her, and though other climbers went to her parties, they went for the parties, not for her. Her daughters were pale ghosts in the background - she saw to that.

The 'eighties was the age of social lions - Mrs. Leo Hunter was always in *Punch*, and hostesses specialized in various sorts of guests. Emily's speciality, of course, was a large collection of very bright legal lights, but she made raids into the world of her youth, and returned triumphantly, with carefully selected authors, artists, and musicians, from Upper Bohemia, and a few politicians, mostly Conservatives of course, but with a sprinkling of wavering Liberals who could bear caustic criticism of Mr. Gladstone and his adroit methods of extricating himself from awkward situations.

'Labouchère says he doesn't so much mind the G.O.M. always producing the ace of trumps from up his sleeve,' said one of these waverers, 'but he does object to his saying the Almighty put it there.'

A stray stalwart, out of his element here, protested that Gladstone was no hypocrite. 'What horrors are happening to poor Gordon,' twittered an advanced woman, who had strong political opinions about women's votes. 'Yet you still believe in the cause and centre of them all, your Grand Old Man!'

'Oh, dear, where will it all end! It is shocking to think of,' sighed another, who allowed her husband to form her views.

'My dear, you forget that even greater villain, Joseph Chamberlain,' put in a sprightly old lady with white hair, who had been a friend of Peel. 'He is as bad as that dreadful

man Henry George, whose book *Progress and Poverty* my husband says is putting wild notions into the heads of the people.'

'He thinks there is but one thing wanted to make this world a paradise, and that is to confiscate the property of the land-owners of the world.'

'Oh, dear, where will it all end,' came the plaintive wail.

'His idea,' the sprightly old lady went on, 'apparently is that for each ruined landlord there would be twenty redeemed ladies of pleasure, and as many reformed drunkards. All the vice in the world is due to landowning, according to him.'

'My dear, tell me,' asked Georgiana interestedly, 'how does he think this is to be brought about?'

But the sprightly lady could not tell her; she had not, of course, handled the dreadful book herself. Georgiana reflected that it was always the same nowadays, nobody, no woman at least, ever read anything for herself; she talked with great certainty and no knowledge. Not that modern books seemed worth reading; never had women themselves played so poor a part in literature; where was anyone to touch Jane Austen or the Brontë sisters? She turned back with pleasure to the writings of her friends Mary Somerville and Mary Everest Boole, who, at least, would disprove to a later generation the curious legend which was springing up that all Victorian women were ninnies. Mary Somerville had clarified the subject of mathematics, and Mary Boole spent her life in the quest of truth, the endeavour to show by precept and practice the art of thinking; her mind was a filter, through which the conflicting ideas on science and religion passed, and emerged as clear as crystal; she considered Darwinism as calmly as the later phases of esoterism and theosophy; she was as universal in her mental interests as Herbert Spencer, but less rigid; she had had the supreme gift of common sense, and, surrounded by passionate argument, had kept both her head and her temper. Georgiana considered her books *The Preparation of the Child for Science* and *The Forging of Passion into Power*, masterpieces; yet nowadays

nobody seemed to have heard of them; and indeed, how should they, when, in an age whose chief characteristic was an increase in vulgar self-advertisement, she chose to remain anonymous.

'The truth of the matter,' Georgiana said to her daughter, in a rare burst of intolerance, 'is that modern women, clamouring so loudly for their rights, haven't the brains of peewits. They can't read *Progress and Poverty* for themselves.'

She could, and agreed with a great deal of it. She did not take socialism as seriously as her daughter did; she had watched too many political vogues come and go, and too many violent Radicals shepherded quietly into the Tory fold. She had watched the Georgian age give way to the Victorian, and now was watching the Victorian give way to the Edwardian, and it was like watching the swinging pendulum of a clock. The aristocracy of her youth had been stripped of its privileges, but the power of wealth remained; mechanical contrivances had certainly made some things easier, but hurry had taken the place of leisure, and no one seemed any the better for it. There had been so many reforms, promising so much, and nothing had come of them. There had been, in her daughter's generation, such a parade of conscious virtue, and now the pendulum was swinging back to an almost Georgian urbanity: it was an open secret that the Prince of Wales had much the same views as she herself had retained from his grandfather's, or rather from his great uncle William's, time. He thought that, within bounds, people should amuse themselves in the ways they liked best, not with vice for viciousness sake, by any means, but with amusements that really did amuse, among which, no doubt, might be found the unfilial one of knocking over such Aunt Sallys as pomposity and humbug. Like most lively young people, he was inclined to overdo the toppling of idols in which he did not believe, and she heard a good deal of talk of the 'moral rot' caused by the Marlborough House set. For forty years she had watched respectability worshipped as the God of Gods, and though she remembered,

and preferred, the period before the God had been set up, she was sorry to see it destroyed so violently with kicks and buffets; it might have been given a lesser, but still honourable, place among the Gods, she thought; but you had to be very old to look at things so dispassionately.

She said so to Maud, but Maud ventured to think that age had very little to do with it. It was, she believed, a matter of good temper, and grandmamma's temper was superlative; besides, she did not seem old, not nearly so old as mamma, in fact, though she was full of stories of an age incredibly remote, before railways and omnibuses, the age of stage coaches and Grand Tours, of scanty dress and natural gaiety, before the crinoline came in and Sunday became a day of penance, when gentlemen only smoked surreptitiously in kitchens or conservatories, and young ladies never walked abroad without a footman at their heels.

'When I was young,' grandmamma told Vicky and the round-eyed Maud, 'it was considered a dreadful thing for a lady of quality to go out walking without a manservant bearing a cane. Cabs were not considered at all proper for ladies, and as for omnibuses . . .'

'Did you and mamma never go in an omnibus?' Georgiana's eyes twinkled as she remembered Emily's flight to Paris, and the hubbub it had caused. She twinkled a good deal, in fact, as she spoke demurely of the proprieties and, in the words of Mrs. Lynn Lynton, deplored the laxity of the present age, and Maud, who knew the story of her elopement with Arthur Quisite, but had kept it from Vicky, wondered if in any age great emotion had paid any heed to propriety.

'I did sometimes ride in an omnibus,' grandmamma confessed after a pause, 'because at one time we hadn't much money, and couldn't keep a footman, but I always was chaperoned by your mother.'

Maud's eyes twinkled, too, but Vicky's were solemn; mamma, of course, must have been a veritable dragon of a chaperone.

'Why hadn't you any money, granny?' asked Vicky, who was much too curious. Georgiana looked at her severely; 'A tactless question, Vicky?' She relented, however, to say: 'Mr. Hudson, the Railway King, took it all.'

'What did he do with it?' asked Vicky.

'Bought a very fine house, I believe, and splendid dresses for his wife. It was always reported that Mrs. Hudson said to her maid, "Dress me for ten"; "Dress me for twenty," according to the grandeur of her party.'

'Did you go to her fine house?'

'Not I. But your grandfather did, and found it very gorgeous and uncomfortable.'

'Did he . . .'

'That will do, Vicky,' said her grandmother, crisply, having heard Charles's step on the stairs. Maud's questions were few and intelligent, but Vicky was silly, really silly, it seemed to her grandmother, as shallow-pated as a sparrow. The girl had had the same advantages as Alex and Maud, but was not clever enough to profit by them.

Mr. Delane was one of the first distinguished men to take an interest in the children; he was immensely kind to young people, and always ready to listen, and to treat them as if they were almost grown up, which was very flattering to a feather-pate like Vicky; he was full of fun and always teasing. The children used to see him riding in Rotten Row, and he took Alex and Vicky to the Opera, where they heard Grisi and Mario sing in *Norma* and Patti on her first appearance, when the house seemed as if it must burst with the violence of the applause. They heard Christine Nilsen, too, like a 'crash of artillery', and Pauline Lucca in *Faust*. The Opera was a very expensive amusement, but Charles's friends often brought tickets for the girls. *Faust* had created a great sensation abroad, but it was produced in London with some hesitation, since it was not an opera to which *jeune filles* should go. Georgiana, however, said with a twinkle, that opera in a foreign tongue

was different from an English play, and that the girls could listen to the music as they would not understand the words. Maud, curiously, as it seemed to her musical family, did not care for Grand Opera, but for the Gilbert and Sullivan comic operas she developed an enthusiasm which her father, at least, considered absurd.

Georgiana thought that she could account for it, but she did not mention her suspicions to anyone but Charles, for Maud's sensitiveness would take fright at the mildest teasing, and her grandmother did not want the delicate bud of the romance she anticipated spoilt before it blossomed. Or perhaps, she owned, the wish for the romance was father to the thought.

On a Sunday afternoon when Maud had been helping her grandmother with the teacups, a young man from America had brought a letter from an old friend.

'Charles, do you remember Mary Blane, at Montreal?' Georgiana had cried as she greeted the boy warmly. Charles did, and very vividly.

'She sang "Maryland, my Maryland" until she had us all in tears,' he told the boy.

'She still sings it,' Stephen Blane confessed. 'And "Dixie" and all the Southern songs. She has a lovely voice.'

'She hadn't you when I heard her,' said Charles.

'Only just not,' Stephen said, 'I was born the next year.'

'You are very welcome, my dear, for her sake as well as your own. This is my granddaughter. Maud, look after Stephen.'

The boy was as shy as Maud was, but they exchanged a few words and many friendly glances, as the talk of their elders flowed over their heads, talk of plays and books, gossip of the week, stories from the clubs, political prophecies. Many burning questions divided the company, but 'Home Rule' was the question of questions; like the 'Reform Bill' of forty years before, it divided families and friends.

Georgiana had never cared much for Mr. Gladstone, though she admitted his good qualities; he was too hopelessly middle-class in outlook, and talked such earnest humbug. Dizzy was a humbug, too, of course, all politicians were, but not, thank God, an earnest one.

'Politics!' said Maud to Stephen Blane, with a little grimace.

'Tremendously interesting,' said Stephen, but his eyes were fixed on her, and not on the amateur politicians.

Presently they drifted to the other end of the room. 'Have you seen *The Mikado*?' asked Maud, shyly.

'Rather!' Stephen answered enthusiastically. 'In America we are wild about the Gilbert and Sullivan Operas, "enthusiasm bordering on insanity", as our papers say.'

'I'm so glad,' said Maud, forgetting her shyness. 'I adore Mr. Gilbert, too. He is one of my very special friends. Which do you like best? I do hope it's *Patience*. That's my very own opera. At least, Mr. Gilbert said it was when he wrote "*The Magnet and the Churn*".'

'Of course *Patience* is my favourite,' said Stephen, making it so from that moment. Maud put a hand on his sleeve to draw his attention to a tall man by the fire, 'That's Mr. Rutland Barrington,' she whispered, 'and Mr. Grossmith is over there. I think they are going to sing.'

"My object all sublime
I shall achieve in time
To let the punishment fit the crime
The punishment fit the crime".'

'Isn't he wonderful?' asked Maud, with shining eyes.

'Wonderful,' echoed Stephen, gazing at her admiringly.

Georgiana, catching sight of her granddaughter, turned smilingly to her companion, and presently Maud was given one of her favourite songs:

“And everyone will say
 As you walk your flowery way,
 If he's content with a vegetable love, which would certainly
 not suit me,
 Why! what a most particularly pure young man this pure young
 man must be”.’

‘I believe he might be good enough for Maud,’ thought Georgiana, watching her granddaughter and the young American. ‘Do you sing, Stephen? Surely your mother's son must have a voice.’

Stephen blushing owned that he sang a little. ‘Come along then, what shall it be?’

“‘Prithee, pretty maiden, prithee tell me true
 Hey but I'm doleful, willow willow waly.
 Have you ere a lover a dangling after you?
 Hey willow waly O.
 I would fain discover
 If you have a lover
 Hey willow waly O”.’

‘Delightful. I can hear your mother's tone. Now sing us “Dixie”, Stephen, for old times' sake.’

Georgiana asked her friend, Mr. Gilbert, if she might bring Stephen Blane with Maud to tea with him at Harrington Gardens.

Gilbert, who was never a bear with children, gave them a delightful party, like the parties at Mr. Dickens's, Georgiana said, to which she and Emily used to go. Maud, in a white gauze dress, with rosebuds in her hair, revolved happily in Stephen Blane's arms to the dreamy strains of the ‘Blue Danube’. It was a lovely party; she adored waltzing, and she liked Stephen enormously. But she was too young to talk of love. Stephen reluctantly acquiesced, when Mrs. Hansike said so, but he thought sixteen the ideal age to talk of love.

'It wouldn't be fair to her, Stephen. Think how long you must wait before you could think of marriage.' That persuaded him, for, of course, where Maud was concerned, he would never do anything that seemed unfair.

So Stephen went to Oxford, and Maud continued to alternate between the gloom and depression of her own home, and the brilliance, rather too sparkling for her youth, of her grandmother's.

Vicky was falling into a fever because she never seemed to meet any suitable young men. She could, and did, fall in love with anyone, from Mr. Arthur Balfour to the handsome footman at No. 52, but either they could not be regarded as suitable, or else they failed to reciprocate her passion. On All Hallow's E'en the girls performed mysterious rites in the dark with apples and a mirror; Maud with candle held high, gazing a little fearfully into the dim mirror, saw a face like Stephen's, and was silent about it, but Vicky's imagination called up the new curate at St. Faith's, which set her in a flutter and proved embarrassing to Maud. Vicky, in her excitable moods, had no sense of decorum; she would fling herself, innocently, yet in the most obvious, most painful way, at the head of any attractive young man; only under her father's eye could Vicky be crushed into an appearance of decorum.

Family entertainments were terribly heavy affairs, Maud thought. She and Vicky would be sent to inspect the dining-room, a futile expedition as they knew very well, since mamma would follow them and speedily squash any suggestions they might make. The feasts were gargantuan, to match the massive mahogany chairs which loomed round the long table with its branched candlesticks and tall silver epergne – fashioned like a group of palm trees, feathered with slim foliage – and roses. On the massive sideboard stood a row of decanters of port, sherry and claret, and the Dresden china dessert service in blue and gold, which was so much admired. The inspection over, and mammas' 'you girls are no help to me', accepted in silence,

they ran away to dress, a complicated business with crimping irons, and the agonized pulling of stay laces, and bustles which would not stay in place, and hooks and eyes which would not fasten.

From the upper landing they peeped through the banisters to watch the arrival of the guests. The gentlemen put down their hats and coats out of sight in the outer hall, and then came in to wait for the ladies, exchanging purely masculine conversation, unconscious of the youthful feminine ears eavesdropping with delight. The ladies, swathed in shawls and plaids, came upstairs to a spare bedroom, where pins and looking glasses and brushes were spread out for them, but not powder puffs, and, looking like butterflies newly emerged from the chrysalis, sailed downstairs again to join their husbands, and lean on their arms when entering the great drawing-room. Behind late-comers, demurely, Vicky and Maud crept in.

The legend of papa's omniscience was always a little frayed at dinner, for mamma always carved the joint, and her daughters, who had, on rare occasions, watched papa's bungling efforts in that line, were glad of the daring innovation. The girls did their demure best in the way of conversation with the uninteresting neighbours allotted to them, but the main purpose of dinner, after all, was food, and to that the gentlemen might be trusted to do justice. At the far end of the table, twinkling like a star amid gas-lamps, grandmamma met Maud's admiring eyes; in *her* neighbourhood gentlemen seemed less engrossed with food.

It was over at last, and mamma collected eyes; with a rustle and tinkle of fans and chains and scent bottles and scarves the ladies sailed away, leaving the gentlemen to their wine, and, collected in groups of chattering, yawning boredom until the gentlemen reappeared and scattered them into separate activity again like running balls of quicksilver. This was a moment which Maud dreaded, for she knew the inevitableness of 'Will you sing, my dear?'

There were always a number of preceding invitations, of course, ladies who gracefully acknowledged, 'You sing so sweetly', or 'You have such a lovely touch', and were coyly doubtful if their music had been remembered, though it was always discovered with their husbands' coats in the hall. Maud must suffer in silence, while 'Songs Without Words' and 'The Lost Chord' enchanted less critical ears, and bedewed more sentimental eyes. Into this sticky atmosphere she longed to throw a musical bombshell, but, demurely, she obliged them with 'A Little Summer Shower' or some Mendelssohn.

At ten o'clock the tea-urn appeared, and a little before eleven carriages were announced; the ladies rustled away to put on their wraps, and departed with smiles and compliments, and 'such a delightful evening'. Another ten minutes to exchange social insincerities with mamma, and then Vicky and Maud were free to throw off this crust they hated, and become their lively, natural selves with hair-brushes and wrappers.

'Oh, Vicky, what a bore! Thank heaven, that's over! How I hate stays.'

'Did you see Mrs. Brown being arch?'

'Appalling; but not as dreadful as Mrs. Lincoln's songs.'

'Shall we ever escape, do you think, Maud?'

'Heaven knows! Thank goodness there is grandmamma.'

Thank goodness, indeed, for grandmamma, and from under their pillows came copies of *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss*. There was silence until mamma's footsteps were heard on the stairs, when Vicky hastily scrambled out of bed, and put out the light.

CHAPTER IV

THE world was stirring with new freedoms, but Vicky and Maud seemed bound upon a wheel; at home they were ciphers, frightened chits shrinking from their father's stern eye and their mother's too inquisitive one; at their grandmother's they were shadows, because their wits were so much less nimble than those of her friends. It was, Georgiana thought, a life of deplorable futility for young women, far more so than any that she and Caroline had known, and when Vicky, with some contempt, described people as 'early Victorian', Georgiana raised her eyebrows. It was the first time she had heard the word used in derision, and she wanted to know what qualities Vicky thought it described. But Vicky, as usual, was vague and muddled.

'If you mean by it "possessing a sense of decency", I see no reason for derision,' said grandmamma crisply. 'You have been reading some of these new sex novels, I suspect, Vicky, and they are not agreeing with you. I don't like indecency. These modern writers will say anything. It's ill-bred.'

Vicky blushed, for she had indeed been reading, under the bedclothes, some very odd books, Ouida and *Dorian Gray* and even odder things.

Grandmamma laughed at Ouida, who was, she said, excessively disagreeable, and inordinately vain, with an insatiable love of notoriety. 'You know she writes very foolishly. Do you remember that description of a boat race in which the match was won by stroke rowing faster than his companions? And her Guardsmen are ridiculous, all whiskers and waist.'

And *Dorian Gray*? Georgiana was less sure of that. It was unwholesome, but it had a certain wit. That young man Wilde was undoubtedly amusing, and probably clever. She

met him often at first nights, when, if opportunity could be made, he took the floor; the snatches of conversation which she overheard seemed to consist chiefly of epigrams made from proverbs divertingly applied. He obviously desired to astonish and to dazzle, and often succeeded. Georgiana enjoyed listening to him, but had no desire to know him; there was something oily and fat - repellent - about him, an obvious indolence and self-indulgence which disgusted her. His fingers were flabby and greasy as he shook hands limply, and his skin looked dirty; he was overdressed, his clothes seemed too tight for him, and he wore, very affectedly, a green scarab ring. No, she did not like him, yet when she caught sight of his laughing, vivacious eyes, and heard his gay, lightning-quick *ripostes*, she was not so sure; he was a superb talker, and good talk was her delight. Could he possibly be the lost dramatist of the century for whom she had been hoping, the inheritor of Sheridan's shoes? How stimulating it was to hear again someone talking in brilliant paradoxes.

'No modern literary work of any worth has been produced by any English author,' she overheard.

'Oh, Mr. Wilde,' came a protesting chorus.

'I will make one exception,' he conceded, 'I will grant you Bradshaw.'

Georgiana chuckled delightedly. His talk made one forget his physical peculiarities. After all Sheridan had been a sot.

Whistler brought young Wilde to tea with Georgiana on a Sunday afternoon, with two other young men, who listened raptly to every word he spoke; yet Mr. Wilde himself sat at Whistler's feet, to listen to his new aesthetic gospel.

'There never was an artistic period; there never was an art-loving nation,' said Whistler.

Wilde lectured on Whistler's gospel as if it had been his own. Maud went to his lectures on 'The English Renaissance' and 'The House Beautiful', which had a *succès de scandale*; she heard of him at a thousand tea-tables; she listened to him as, dressed

in knee breeches, silk stockings, and wearing strange flowers in his coat, green carnations and gilded lilies, he talked of Baudelaire. She was repelled, fascinated, drawn back to the circle round him like a needle to a magnet, generally in the company of young Michael Font, who was an ardent disciple of the new prophet. 'Bunthornes', they were, both of them, and she had laughed at the twenty lovesick maidens, yet found herself lovesick, if not exactly for Oscar, for his company. She was not in love with him, of that she was quite sure, yet she was bored with the company of less brilliant talkers. Michael Font could, at least, repeat the idol's epigrams, and shine with reflected brilliance. Maud was a great deal in his company, and Stephen Blane grew worried, for he shared the repulsion, without feeling the fascination; his inclination was to put his foot on the fat white worm which made him shudder.

Georgiana counselled tact and patience, but she, too, was anxious. She had set her heart on this romance of Stephen's, and was inexpressibly shocked when Maud told her that she was going to marry Michael Font. Georgiana knew nothing against him, her dislike was purely instinctive, and though Charles shared it, he had no better reason to give. Michael Font was a young man of property, an aspiring poet, and a pupil in Wilde's school of wit.

'Not too early a marriage, Maud,' they all begged her, and to that she assented. She was twenty, and not too wildly, she suspected, in love; yet sufficiently in love to find Stephen Blane an exceedingly ordinary, dull young man, incapable of epigrams.

Swept into a brilliant circle, Maud ceased to be a shadow and became an echo instead. The 'nineties had a delusive flavour of difference; *fin de siècle* Vicky began to say, as if that were unique.

'Now what exactly do you mean by that, my love?' Georgiana asked her, and, when Vicky stared, added thoughtfully: 'My mother was *fin de siècle*, too, *dix huitième siècle*, of course.'

It was too bad of grandmamma to prick Vicky's bubbles of vanity so deftly, Maud thought, dropping, for herself, the ridiculous affectation of believing that *fin de siècle* meant anything in particular except a convenient phrase. As a matter of fact, Georgiana pointed out, if one decade stood out more clearly than another, it had been the 1880's rather than the 1890's; from the terrible day in 1885 when Gordon's head had been brought to Slatin Pasha, to the revelation of the Pigott forgeries and the disgrace of Parnell, England had enjoyed an unparalleled series of thrills.

The 'Home Rule' Bill had been introduced in 1886, and had cleft the Liberal party in two. 'Mr. Gladstone's unscrupulous sophistry', his ex-followers had cried out, as they left him to his little amusements at Hawarden, his woollen comforters and timber felling, his economical postcards to unimportant people, and his general remoteness from a real and unpleasant world.

In 1887 there had been the Jubilee. Georgiana had often felt, and sometimes been, a little satirical about the Queen, but as the years passed she had developed, rather against the grain, an affection for her, and when in 1887 Victoria celebrated her jubilee, Mrs. Hansike was as loyal and moved as any of her subjects. There was something that touched Georgiana's imagination in this little, dowdy, rather plain old lady who had reigned for fifty years, but whom she could remember as a slender child. Though she abhorred shows, Georgiana insisted on seeing this one, and secured a very good seat in the Abbey. It was an occasion which inevitably called up old memories; how well she remembered seeing the Abbey prepared for the coronation of George IV - her father, she supposed, if the old tales were true - a useless speculation, and a father in whom it was impossible to feel any pride.

There was a roar of guns outside as the Queen drew near; then the whole Abbey rustled to its feet, and up the nave came kings and queens and princesses in scarlet and gold, ermine and

jewels, flashing and splendid, and behind them came a stout little figure in a plain black satin gown, with a white bonnet banded with black velvet, very plain and commonplace, yet indescribably moving, so that there was a tightening in every throat; the little old lady in black was somehow more impressive than she would have been in ermine and scarlet.

'My cousin the Queen,' thought Georgiana with a prick of pride, forgiving the little old lady for having sat so long upon the throne that should have been her sister Charlotte's. Georgiana had loved Charlotte, yet she thought now: 'Charlotte was far prettier, far more attractive as a girl, but I don't know; she might not have done as well.'

The Victorian oppression was certainly lifting; the Jubilee seemed to have broken a spell, and created a legend that the little old lady had really been popular all the time. She herself was pleased with the legend and quite ready to believe it. 'You see,' she said to the Prince of Wales, 'I am more popular than you.'

She was free from Mr. Gladstone, of course. That was enough to account for her increasing cheerfulness. Mr. Gladstone himself was examining that appallingly subversive book, *Robert Elsmere*, as if it had been an heretical document which affected the safety of the Established Church.

Georgiana found the book interesting but not epoch-making. Her hopes of something epoch-making in literature were still centred in the theatre; the Bancrofts, Robertson, Jones, and Pinero had done a good deal to pull the drama out of the pit, by causing a revolt against the absurd and often deplorable burlesques which burlesqued nothing, and which seemed to consist chiefly of the antics of large numbers of shapely ladies in tights, very pleasant to look at, no doubt — Georgiana suffered no moral shock, but found it intellectually unsatisfying. Long before it was supposed to be proper for ladies to go to music halls Charles had taken her to Evans's where he introduced her to the celebrated Paddy Green.

Georgiana was amused, but, Charles chaffed her, disappointed because the proceedings were so decorous.

'That kind of amusement is all right, Charles, but a very poor substitute for Sheridan.'

'I doubt if there will be another of his quality.'

'Oh, don't be pessimistic, Charles. Once in a century a dramatist appears to crop up.'

'The enchanting entertainment of the Savoy Operas, my dear, is probably this century's contribution to the stage.'

'You're right, I expect. I was thinking of them as operas, but of course they are drama as well. Immortal, I think.'

Nevertheless, when, in 1889, Ibsen's *Doll's House* was at last produced, Georgiana set out to see it in a state of high excitement. Was this the epoch-making play at last? She was interested, particularly in Janet Achurch as 'Nora', but was curiously disappointed. Ibsen was dreary stuff, and the more she saw of him, the more she considered that unrelieved gloom and sin, disease, and misery, were unsuitable subjects for the theatre; Shakespeare knew better than that, and Molière and even Racine. No, it wouldn't do. Neither would Mr. and Mrs Sydney Webb's amusing friend, George Bernard Shaw; he had a great deal to say, too much to say, indeed, but the ingredients of his mixture were all in the wrong proportions, so that they produced neither a sermon nor a play, simply a little sense and a great deal of crackle, vastly diverting all the same.

She consoled herself for her disappointment with the stage by an orgy of opera going during the next few years: Rejane was in London, but so were Edouard and Jean de Reszke. Rossini and Donizetti and Gounod had been the stays of the London Opera House; the performances had been ill rehearsed and ill staged; the orchestra was appalling, and the singers, for the most part, terrible. Georgiana, who remembered Mario and Grisi and Jenny Lind had found the performances inexpressibly tedious, until Lady de Grey took up opera as a hobby, as a fairy waves a magic wand, and then there was Melba, enchant-

ing as 'Mimi', and Jean de Reszke as a knightly 'Lohengrin' and Hans Richter conducting performances of Wagner. Then, at last, musically, Emily came into her own; the *Ring*, *Tristan*, the *Meistersingers*, were given as they ought to be, and Emily, entranced, forgot the pretty things of Meyerbeer to which her youthful feet had danced. Wagner had been composing then, and she had not known it – half a lifetime lost!

It was to the music of *Lohengrin* that Maud was married.

A melancholy business that marriage was, Georgiana thought. It had been opposed, and a reluctant consent won to it only after three years of waiting, a consent at which the lovers should have shown signs of rejoicing, but at which they did not; to Georgiana's shrewd, anxious eyes they seemed to shrink from the prospect, yet refused to give it up. Did they love each other? Georgiana did not think so. There was some queer, untranquil feeling, which compelled them, but it was not love; Maud seemed goblin-driven, dreamily listening to their cry: 'Come buy our fruits, come buy.' Michael gave the impression of clinging to a life-buoy in dark stormy seas.

Mrs. Hansike ventured one of her rare intrusions into business which was not primarily hers.

'Are you set on this marriage, Maud?'

'Entirely, grandmamma.'

'Forgive me, my darling, but are you sure you love him?'

'Quite sure.' Maud's tone was firm, though her lips quivered. Georgiana sighed, and Maud, who was standing behind her chair, put her arms suddenly round her grandmother's neck. 'I am happy, truly, grannie, though not quite in the way I expected. Michael does need me so. I couldn't give him up.'

Georgiana pondered on that: '*Needs me*', but why? Charles, distastefully driven to make inquiries, could learn nothing against the young man. He was flabby and long haired, had a limp handshake and a pasty skin, but these seemed natural qualities in modern young poets, who disliked fresh air and babbled of *les fleurs de mal*. It was mostly babble, apparently;

Michael, as far as he could discover, had affectations, but no definite vices: he was an orphan, well off, the settlements were generous; he had no known entanglements, and had set his heart on a willing Maud. There was nothing to be done but wish them happiness, even if one had no anticipation of it.

Georgiana threw an old shoe after their carriage, and went home in her own, weeping on Charles's shoulder.

Vicky, too, was in tears. She found it a humiliation beyond bearing that her younger sister should be married before her; she had just enough imagination to look down the appalling corridors of the future in her father's house. 'It won't do,' she thought, 'I must escape, anyhow, with anyone.' But how? She had waited trustingly and in vain for the eligible young man of her dreams to appear; now she must be content with anyone she could get. Aunt Caroline's kind, malicious, legacy could buy freedom for her as it had done for Alex. She need not starve. So Vicky set out to bedazzle that shy curate of St. Faith's whose face she had seen in her mirror as she bit her apple on All Hallow's E'en.

'Ta-Ra-ra-ra-Boom-de-Ay' carolled Vicky happily at the beginning of 1892, as she wheeled her new bicycle into Soho Square and mounted beside her curate for a ride in Battersea Park. Both song and cyclists were becoming a nuisance, thought Georgiana, as she watched them depart. But Vicky was happy, and that was a great deal to be thankful for; no one else seemed to share her joy, except all the thousands who had caught the bicycling mania, and were pedalling away in the Park like mad.

It promised to be a bleak and quarrelsome year. Cardinal Manning died in January, and Mr. Gladstone, Professor Huxley, and the Duke of Argyle were having a violent newspaper dispute about the book of Genesis and the existence of God. The influenza epidemic swept over England as the plague used to do, and the untimely death of the Duke of Clarence was hardly noticed by the Grants, on whom the new plague settled with

peculiar virulence; Jeremy died of it, at Maudline, a week before it claimed his half-brother in Berkeley Square.

Tim Grant had never reached the Woolsack for which his wife had sacrificed his happiness; querulous, exacting, frightening, he had passed the last two years of his life in a mental twilight just removed from sanity which no one could lighten but his wife. It was a sad ending to the agreeable young man she remembered half a century ago, thought Georgiana, grieving far more deeply for the good-natured, lazy, Jeremy, but unable to spare more than a passing thought for either of them, because she was fighting death day and night for Charles. She won the battle, but was so shaken by it that Charles took her to Switzerland for a new honeymoon. They sat hand in hand on a balcony at St. Moritz, sniffing the air.

'I couldn't do without you, Charles.'

'Of course not, my love. You remember how La Fontaine's dying wife pressed his hand and said, 'Ah, mon pauvre ami, qui te comprendra quand je ne serai plus?'' '

'Don't tease me, my dear. I know as well as you do that we are very absurd.'

'I wish the young people were half as absurd. Shall we send for Maud?'

'She won't come, Charles. I've asked her. She won't leave him for a day, though she is about as happy as a prisoner in chains. What's wrong with him, Charles?'

But though he suspected the reason, Charles would not say. It was Alex, on whom they called on their way home through Paris, who enlightened her grandmother.

Alex lived untidily in a big studio in the Latin Quarter, not as romantic a life as Du Maurier and Mürger depicted, but one quite as disorderly.

Georgiana asked if she used her paint brushes to do her hair, but Alex only laughed. She was happier than most people and cared nothing for order. In and out of her studio strolled half the artists of Parisian Bohemia; her six pounds a week, paid

regularly, was a fortune in the eyes of most of them, who dipped into it lavishly for their requirements, and were never turned away. 'It's like a home for lost dogs and cats,' said Georgiana.

'They're mostly rascals, Alex,' added Charles.

'I know, darlings, but they all seem so helpless, and what does it matter? They generally leave me enough to eat.'

'How many of them sleep here, Alex?' asked Georgiana with interest.

'Not more than two or three, grannie, and always mixed,' Alex answered with a twinkle. 'My morals are still sound, though I've thrown conventions overboard.'

'You're still young, my dear.'

'I know. There have been dangerous moments, but I run away. I'm safer, if you only knew it, than Maud is.'

'What do you mean by that, Alex?' asked her grandmother sharply.

'Maud should have married Stephen, grannie. She's always loved him, and how you were all so mad as to let her marry that perverted weakling, I've never been able to understand.'

'Perverted?' Charles exclaimed.

'Yes, do you mean to tell me none of you knew?'

'It never crossed my mind.'

'It should have, Charles. You're all like ostriches. Decadence is the fashion and young Michael must needs follow it, but he's a weakling and so needs a life-buoy close at hand. Maud is to save him when he feels an inclination to be saved. I *loathe* these cautious sinners.'

'Are you sure, Alex? How can you know?'

'Grannie, dear, I am surrounded by them. Half the art students and would-be poets in Paris drink too much absinthe and dabble in strange sins. *Fin de siècle*, they call themselves, and exult in decadence and destroy their bodies, and, one supposes, their souls.'

'What can we do?'

Alex, seeing her grandmother, for the first time in her

memory, unequal to a situation, was acutely distressed; she had thought her invincible. 'You can do nothing, darling. Maud thinks she can save him. Perhaps she can.'

Charles enjoyed Paris after his long absence from it; it had a flavour that he had never been able to find in London, subtler, more elegant, wittier. The world of fashion was not as brilliant as it had been during the second Empire, but the Boulevards still sparkled; Aurélien Scholl's epigrams were repeated everywhere; Jean Lorrain, over the signature of 'Raistif de la Bretonne', wrote his chronicle of the gallantries of Paris and the antics of its favourite courtesans; the wits and beauties rushed to the 'Divan Japonais' and to 'Le Concert Parisien' to applaud Yvette Guilbert on the stage which had last seen La Grande Thérèse; the Jew, Arton, wielded his cutting pen; Forain stabbed with his cruel social satires and the *Intransigeant* articles from the pen of Henri Rochefort dripped vitriol; Arthur Mayer inspired designers of revues; Caran d'Ache produced his witty drawings, and the reporters of *Figaro* and *Gil Blas* gallantly enumerated the doings of the pretty ladies at assemblies or in the Bois. Charles revelled in the company at the 'Divan Japonais'; Alex enjoyed it in a matter-of-course fashion, but Georgiana was a little disconcerted. She was not prudish, but she had never before found herself in the company of ladies of the half world, who disarmed disapproval by wanting to make much of her. Charles, excessively amused at her embarrassment, was prepared to rescue her if she really objected, but she did not; they were so pretty, so ravishing to look at, so diverting to listen to, so charming to her. 'No, no, Charles, never mind my blushes,' she whispered. 'I am hardly likely to be demoralized.' She was as enchanted as she always had been by dancing, and as excited as a girl when she saw Anna Tredane and her brother dance the 'reversed waltz' which they had invented, and which was all the rage.

Emily, who had come to Paris to join her mother, was, on the contrary, shocked at nearly everything she saw. 'See what

these new ways bring us to. This is a decadent period in which we live,' she said severely. 'One hears of nothing but these theatre folk, dancers, music hall stars. You cannot open a newspaper without reading of their toilettes, their jewels, the parties they give. They lose their pearls, or pretend that they do so; they have lawsuits with their tradesmen; they back horses at one hundred to one; they lose their diamond necklaces one day, and find them, very mysteriously, the next. It is a decadent age.'

'Every age is always decadent, my dear,' said Georgiana tranquilly. 'That is because we know so little of the one that preceded it.'

'You are not going to pretend that these women and their doings are important, mamma?'

'No more important than other women's; there are, and always will be, two kinds of women; those people talk of, and those they don't.'

Georgiana could appear tranquil and diverted, but she was sick at heart, and fearful for her dearest granddaughter. 'Let us go home, Charles. I shall be happier near Maud.'

Vicky, they found, was going to have a baby, and was rather boastful about it, as if she were the first woman who had had this brilliant idea. Maud was pale and rather thin, but appeared so cheerful that her mother was reassured; she seemed to avoid her grandmother.

'There is nothing to be done, Charles.'

'Nothing, I fear.'

Maud would make no confidants; she was wrestling with a situation which was full of bewilderment and pain. Vicky, a happy wife and mother to be, was lavish of confidences about an experience which had surprised, but, when she got used to it, contented her. 'How incredibly innocent we were, Maud,' she said. That was true. They had been so shielded from knowledge, from gossip, and from opportunities of observation that even Vicky's eager curiosity had discovered very little

about sex; no vulgar nursemaids, no doubtful governesses, no whispering schoolfellows, had shattered their ignorance; their mother had so shielded them from contact with the vulgar that they knew nothing of the ordinary world; their father's difficult temper had deprived them of playmates; they had never gone to school; their grandmother's experience had not prepared her for an ignorance so complete; she had supposed that they knew as much as was desirable for well-bred young girls. Alex, who might have helped, had shirked discussion of an experience which had disgusted her. Vicky's suppositions, playing about veiled allusions in forbidden books, had half prepared her for a normal life; she was most fortunate in her husband, who, enchanted by an ignorance which he thought charming and very proper, enlightened her with delicacy and tenderness.

Maud was less fortunate. Michael had neither tenderness nor delicacy; he was, or thought himself, devil-driven, and took pride in it; he was a little afraid, but more often vainglorious about his sins, turning to his wife, according to his inclination, remorsefully or boastfully; he might moan over his sins with her arms about him, or repulse her brutally when his mood was set the other way, but in either case he destroyed her tranquillity and happiness; as confessor, or as audience for drama, she must listen to things which, only half understood, yet scorched her ears. Her marriage, which was no marriage, was a tormented relationship which all her endeavours could not improve, and, which she would not break. 'If I were as old and as wise as grandmamma,' she thought wistfully, but loyalty to her husband, her own pride, forbade confidences. She had undertaken a task; she would carry it through alone.

The situation, she thought, was an ironical comment on her mother's doctrine that 'all was for the best in the best of all possible worlds', a world full of good works and missions to the heathen, a world in which wrongdoing brought inevitable

retribution, though the reward of virtue was sometimes postponed until one reached the next.

She found such social consolations as she could and went out a good deal. There was great excitement at her mother's over Mr. Asquith's sudden elevation. All his brother lawyers thought that they would have fitted the post better.

'I hear Labouchère is furious and puts it about that his exclusion is due to his patriotic conduct over the Royal grants,' said one.

Georgiana, who had been devoted to the bland Pam and the flamboyant Dizzy, thought Asquith was a catastrophe indeed; for the first time she echoed her daughter's constant wail: 'Where are we going?'

She said it more often as the years passed, though not, as a rule, aloud. 'Another Dizzy would have saved us from all this,' she said to an acquiescent Charles. But of course there was no other Dizzy; he belonged to the days that were over, when men rose to a gigantic stature impossible in these levelling days.

She had not forgotten that she had laughed very heartily at Dizzy in his early days, when his black ringlets, tasselled canes, vivid waistcoats and black velvet coats had been very striking indeed. But he had gone very quietly, almost shabbily, dressed in his later years, and had been no less impressive. Perhaps, her just mind said, some of these very mediocre young men might show that they had something in them presently, but truckling to democracy could not be for the good of the country; 'most of the voters,' Dizzy had said, 'only concentrated their minds on half a pint.'

It was reassuring that Dizzy's habit of annexation continued. The 'nineties showed an imperialism more aggressive than any since Elizabeth's; Egypt and the Nile were well in hand; Burmah with its ruby mines had been added to the empire; trade depression was over, unemployment diminished, prosperity leaping ahead. It was Dizzy's legacy, not the work of



MAUD HAD A NEW WALKING COSTUME

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the new men, but undoubtedly England was on top of the world.

Georgiana, however, had seen England on top of the world before, and regarded jingoism with distrust, while Charles, still a power in Fleet Street, foresaw trouble looming in Africa and a hostile Europe ready to cheer on rebels. Never had England been so heartily disliked upon the continent as when Wolseley having finished with the Zulus, the Transvaal Boers objected to annexation and won Majuba Hill. Mr. Gladstone, quite unequal to the situation, of course, temporized, while the colonists savoured their humiliation, Mr. Cecil Rhodes developed his ideas on government, and gold from the Transvaal reached London.

Frank Grant, always hot on the trail of gold, took ship from Melbourne to South Africa. Alex, smiling wryly, arrived unexpectedly at her grandmother's with Frank's letter in her hand. 'He's sent his son home to me, and I'm to meet him in London,' she announced.

'This is the first that's been heard of the boy, surely.'

'I had heard of him, Grannie. His mother was no good, a barmaid or something of the kind at Ballarat. Frank left Ronnie with her until she got too outrageous; now he is giving the boy to me.'

'Is he illegitimate?'

'I suppose so, but there may be a marriage of sorts. They have shilling marriage shops, I believe, in Australia, something like our old Fleet marriages, only worse. Frank wouldn't think it mattered, you know.'

'He might remember that his mother will,' said Georgiana.

'Jews and Gentiles are flocking to Johannesburg,' Frank wrote home, 'Oom Paul sits on his veranda with pipe and spittoon and looks on; "We are an agricultural people. What do we want with gold mines?"' says he, grabbing as much as he can of the gold.'

Political England was a little excited about the Transvaal, but London as a whole had its interest divided between the

Labour movement, the new craze for sport, and Mr. Lane's *Yellow Book*.

John Burns and Keir Hardie were in Parliament, and Keir Hardie, in his cloth cap, was played down Whitehall to the House of Commons by a brass band. Mr. and Mrs. Sydney Webb's Fabian Society looked as if it might accomplish something, if its members did not talk too much; certainly their fantastic friend, George Bernard Shaw, would talk too much, a vast amount of nonsense with a little, very amusing, sense.

As for sport, everyone seemed quite crazy about it; London teemed with bicycles; out of London streamed numbers of persons in the oddest clothes to play the 'Royal and Antient' game of golf, and on suburban lawns young ladies in very unsuitable attire were running about frantically after a little ball which they sometimes hit with their triangular tennis racquets.

'Most unwomanly,' said Emily, when she saw these overheated and dishevelled young persons.

'Games would be all right if they wore suitable clothing,' said her mother calmly. 'Mrs. Amelia Bloomer had a very good idea, though her garments lacked beauty. Not more, though, I think than these modern fashions. You know, Emily, these bustles, and bunches, and leg of mutton sleeves are very unbecoming.'

Emily agreed with her, not noticing the whimsical smile with which Georgiana saw her daughter fall into the common custom of old age in finding beauty only in the fashions of its youth. Georgiana might be old-fashioned about clothes, but she was extremely alert on the subject of literature; since their globe-trotting was over all her adventures must be of the mind. Charles brought her a magazine called *The Yellow Book* when it first came out in 1894. 'It appears to be a very revolutionary affair,' he said. But to Georgiana it seemed a very respectable periodical, not at all decadent, whatever that curious word might be supposed to mean. The stories were nothing out of

the way, but it *did* contain some startlingly clever drawings by a young man named Beardsley.

'Exquisite work, Charles,' said his wife, 'but evil, I feel, and decidedly unpleasant.'

Emily, horrified at the drawings, was also shocked by the article on 'A Defence of Cosmetics' by an irreverent young man called Max Beerbohm. Georgiana assured her tranquilly that it was not meant to be taken seriously. 'I like his brand of humour,' she said.

Georgiana found a good deal to interest her in the new literature; she had liked, but been irritated by, Dickens, and had fervently admired Thackeray, while regretting that he had allowed himself to be strangled by the nineteenth-century convention of woman as a figure on the pedestal, a complete ninny, instead of the robust eighteenth-century creature of flesh and blood whom he might have made as immortal as he made his minx Becky. The new novels were much more lifelike, she thought. Her reading had always been as catholic as her tastes, but though she read Hall Caine and Marie Corelli with some interest, she found their novels poor stuff. Maud wrinkled her pretty nose when she found her grandmother deep in Hallam's *Constitutional History*, or Le Bon's *Sur les Évolutions des Forces*, but was immensely entertained when she found her reading a naughty French novel. 'Oh grandmamma, that's no book for a lady.'

'It's just the book for me, then,' said Georgiana with a twinkle.

'May I see it, grannie?' Maud put out a pleading hand.

'I don't know whether you should, Maud. It's beautifully written, but dreadfully improper. It suits my period well enough, but I hear that Hachette's won't sell it on the railway stalls. If only someone would write a good English novel we should not be driven to improper French ones. Do you read them, Maud?'

'Sometimes; as long as I haven't heard mamma *definitely*

disapprove. It's so difficult. She says I shouldn't read the *Yellow Book*, but if I don't I find myself so dreadfully out of date.'

'It won't hurt you, child. Nothing will hurt you, as long as you don't revel in impropriety for impropriety's sake.'

'I don't do that. To tell you the truth, grannie, I don't really much care about it, but it is such a mistake to be always shocked, don't you think.'

'Sensible girl.'

When Charles brought Georgiana a book called *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, she was startled and enthralled: this was literature indeed, free from all arbitrary conventions. Emily naturally found it a horrible book, and said that if she found a copy in her house she would feel obliged to pick it up with the tongs and place it on the fire. Maud read it with distaste tempered by pity; a tale to horrify, she found it, but not a horrible book. Her grandmother pondered on these three opinions.

'In another thirty years, Charles,' she said prophetically, 'people will be reviewing things very much as they viewed them in my youth; just one more swing of the pendulum, and they will be back in my mother's age. Will historians label us all, do you suppose, "The Age of Reason", "The Age of Sensibility", "The Age of Prudishness", then back to reason once more?'

'Not back to reason yet, my dear; you and I are in a very small minority when we profess admiration for Mr. Thomas Hardy's work. They still like sugar and counterpanes. Just look at the theatre. I hear Henry Arthur has been having trouble over a naughty line in his *Case of Rebellious Susan*. Wyndham won't have it that what's sauce for the gander is sauce for the goose.'

The Hansikes delighted in the theatre, adored Ellen Terry, but thought her wasted on Henry Irving, enjoyed the amusing and often brilliant problem plays of Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones. They had recently seen Mrs. Patrick Campbell in

The Second Mrs. Tanqueray and found it extremely refreshing after the inanities of the last fifty years.

'I should put it with *Caste* at the top of this century's efforts, Charles, but neither of them will endure even for *one* hundred years,' Georgiana had said. 'Oh, for another Sheridan!'

'You're prejudiced, my dear,' Charles teased her. 'He is your private possession nowadays, since you are probably the only person who can remember listening to his talk.'

She laughed! 'He was very drunk, Charles, but he had every member of the company in a delighted roar. My mother adored him. I think that friend of Michael's, Mr. Oscar Wilde, has something of his quality. He may produce a masterpiece yet. I like his witty trifles.'

Oscar Wilde had promoted himself to the position of high priest of Mr. Ruskin's aesthetic cult. His robes of office were unusual - a velvet coat with cut steel buttons, knee breeches, and white stockings, while in his hand he carried the insignia of his office, a sunflower. His poses, and those of his acolytes, were very diverting, and not even Gilbert's witty satire had been able to kill the cult, because, with all his absurdities, everyone enjoyed listening to the wonderful Oscar's conversation, which sparkled with epigrams and breath-taking impertinences. He dazzled and intoxicated his listeners until he became a social lion of the highest order; then he was able to exchange the aesthetic cult for the even more diverting one of the reckless man-about-town. He was accustomed to refuse himself no pleasure, and, since ordinary pleasures satiate, it was presently whispered that he had put on the robes of a new high priesthood, and worshipped the strange forbidden gods of Sodom and Gomorrah. Such whispers, as long as they remained whispers, did no great harm; his physical deterioration was marked, but was forgotten, in the charm of his conversation. Michael Font often brought him to Mrs. Hansike's Sunday afternoon receptions, and like most people, she felt his charm, but not enough to miss the

significance of the fact that if he were expected Maud invariably stayed away. Maud's grandmother, unsure of her ground and terrified of blundering, made no comment, but she confined her enjoyment of Mr. Wilde to such semi-public occasions. A faint distrust of his morals, however, could not stop her delight in his plays. When, in February 1895, *The Importance of Being Ernest* was produced by George Alexander, she was enchanted with its wit.

'Sheridan?'

'Not quite, Charles, but brilliant. Much better entertainment than Mr. Shaw's *Widower's Houses* or Ibsen's *Dolls*.'

Though the public revelled in this scintillation, the critics, of course, were scornful, and the sinister rumours gathered strength. Suddenly the scandal flared up in the most public of places. Mr. Wilde was bringing an action for libel against the Marquess of Queensberry.

'What can have possessed him,' whispered shocked voices. 'He must know the action, whatever the result, will spell ruin for himself and for some of his friends.'

But it seemed that he did not; his vanity had so blinded him that he thought he could flout the prejudices of those who had wanted to hear him roar; he overstepped the bounds of the permissible, and revealed some aspects of behaviour which the fashionable world had blandly agreed to ignore. In the witness box, in Victorian England, he had the impertinence to be flippant, and flippancy, always criminal except from judges, became something for which there was no adequate word in a court of law. There was no hope for him after that.

It was, for the audience, extremely diverting, though a few were disturbed at the ugly significance of the questions to which he gave such witty answers. All London talked of little else. It was inevitable that Queensberry should win the action and equally inevitable that another trial should follow, and end in disaster for the wit and for some of his friends; he was ruined, disgraced beyond recovery; his plays were banned, his books

withdrawn, while the law, benevolently, sent him to prison to renew his health and write a masterpiece.

The sensation caused by the trial was enormous, far greater than the Tranby Croft affair of a few years before. Panic seized the world of fashion, and there was an exodus to France, 'which amounted to an emigration'.

Maud, who had looked very pale and nervous during these exciting days, returned from a party at her grandmother's on the last day of the trial, and found a note from her husband on her dressing-table. Michael thought he would be better in Paris for a time.

CHAPTER V

THE year 1895 ended with a sensation almost as riotous as the Wilde trial. 'Dr. Jim', with a positively Elizabethan gesture, dashed over the Transvaal Border to protect the British of the Rand. He was a hero, of course, but he found himself in the dock, and, not discouraged by cheers from the newly-born *Daily Mail*, went to prison. The *Daily Mail* and Mr. Alfred Harmsworth were becoming powers in the land.

Maud, freed from a nightmarish existence by her grass widowhood, read Henley and Kipling and took up life more alertly than she had ever done; blown by a wind of reaction from her past of shadows she put out into wider seas; though crippled she could fly the flag of courage and flaunt her pride. She suddenly developed a rather noisy strain of patriotism, was excited by military bands and swaggered with an aggressive pride of race over the exploits of Dr. Jim.

Stephen Blane, back in England after an absence of two years, had made a fortune in Rand gold, and greatly admired Cecil Rhodes. He met Maud again with an obvious embarrassment which she shared; there was so much between them, spoken and unspoken, so acute a realization of her ghastly mistake. There was no change in Stephen's feelings – never would be, he told Georgiana, and Maud knew well enough now who had her heart. It was a situation which they must blink, of course, and Maud's training had made her adept at blinking, so that after one or two meetings she was able to put Stephen at his ease. So much so that they went boating together one hot Sunday in July, when they both happened to be paying a visit to the Hansikes at Bourne End.

It was very agreeable on the river; they lounged in the green shade and ate sandwiches, Maud looking pretty and cool

in a striped boating dress with a straw boater tipped over her eyes and Stephen looking noticeably manly in flannels, the antithesis of the flabbiness she had grown to loathe. Sedately they discussed the plays of Mr. Bernard Shaw and his odd passion for nuts and Jaeger underwear, and then they talked of America.

'I shall miss you, Stephen,' said Maud incautiously, 'when are you going home?'

'I prefer to stay in the same country as you,' said Stephen, equally off his guard, 'I love you.' He had not meant to say it aloud; for a moment he was startled, then, defiant, he moved to her side. 'Darling, let's stop pretending,' he said gently, 'does our pretence do anyone any good? I love you more than words can say, and you can never go back to that beast.' He drew her into his arms, and for an exquisite moment they forgot civilization while passion flowed over them like a sea in which they drowned.

Maud recovered herself first. 'Let me go, Stephen, while you hold me I can't think.'

But thinking was the last occupation Stephen desired; thinking, he realized, was going to open up very disagreeable vistas. 'One must keep one's contracts,' Maud protested.

'Love, honour and obey, and all that,' said Stephen bitterly, 'can you, Maud?'

'Perhaps not,' she acknowledged, 'but I can be loyal.'

'Not to that - that unspeakable beast.'

'We can be friends, Stephen,' Maud pleaded.

'Friends!' he retorted scornfully, 'how can love be damped down to friendship. Divorce him, Maud. Surely you can for such a crime?'

'I don't know, and anyway I wouldn't.'

'Why not, darling? You can't be tied up to that worm all your life.'

'I couldn't divorce him, Stephen. I couldn't face it, and they wouldn't let me. The family wouldn't, I mean.'

'You can't consider the family in a thing like this. It's your life, not theirs. Alex did it for far less reason than you have.'

'I'm not Alex. I'm not as strong.'

'Stronger, Maud. You have borne more.'

There was no answer to that, but on the main argument Maud was immovable.

'You make a fetish of society,' said Stephen gloomily. 'You mind what people say.'

That was unfair, and he knew it – knew that she really believed in this code she would not break.

'Come away with me, then. Let him divorce you if he likes,' Stephen begged. But that was an even more impossible solution; for that she would have no shadow of excuse. 'We shouldn't live in England, and would soon live down any talk,' Stephen went on.

'It's not talk so much, Stephen,' Maud explained patiently, 'we should feel differently about each other if we stole our happiness at other people's expense. Things would be spoilt for us. Grannie wouldn't like it. Mamma would be hurt very much. In her eyes we should be committing a deadly sin. What we're discussing isn't to be discussed at all. It's out of bounds – a question of right and wrong, and I should always remember that it was a deadly sin.'

'Maud darling, we are living in the 1890's, not in early Victorian times'; cried the exasperated Stephen. But Maud, who had often jeered with her sisters at early Victorian ideas, had no doubt in her mind that this part of the Victorian code was as the laws of the Medes and Persians.

'I mustn't love you, mustn't even talk of love. If we can't meet as friends, we mustn't meet at all.'

Stephen caught her in his arms, and covered her face with kisses. 'If you love me you would do it,' he said.

'I *do* love you, and I won't do it.'

'Strong, Maud. You're as unbendable as iron. It's good-bye, then.'

Maud sat alone in the summer house of her grandmother's Bourne End garden; she sat quite still, numb and cold as if she were dead, drowned under dark cold seas of pain and woe. She had wrecked her life for an idea, and now was not sure if the idea meant anything at all. Victorian! But Victorianism was nearly over. Very little of it remained.

The Queen remained. Maud and Vicky saw her drive by to the Diamond Jubilee service at St. Paul's cathedral. The Queen was in an open carriage with the Princess of Wales. They had parasols open and could not be very clearly seen. It was very impressive, of course, but not, in itself, as striking as the earlier Jubilee had been.

Georgiana did not see the procession, but a few days later they all saw a really exciting thing of flashes and winks and dots, very trying to the eyes, which was yet unmistakably a 'moving picture' of the scene outside St. Paul's. The Bioscope, they called it, and enthusiasts said it was going to prove a wonderful invention.

The Queen, Georgiana thought, was really old now, yet, paradoxically, instead of considering her age, one took it for granted that she would live for ever. Prosperity, such prosperity as had never been dreamed of in her youth, would go on for ever too, and peace. Charles, however, was not so sure about peace. There had been, to his mind, something very unsettling in the Jameson Raid. His old flair for news had never left him, and he sighed impatiently because his body was less youthful than his brain, a heavy, pain-racked body which was very soon to desert his active mind. Georgiana would find him poring over maps and surrounded by South African newspapers. 'There will certainly be trouble there,' he said, and when it came, but only to his wife, he added, 'You see.'

Maud's jingoism flared up very tryingly in the early months of the South African war; she used Vicky's babies as an audience for patriotic songs:

'BLACK WEEK' 1899

'Cook's son, Duke's son, son of a belted earl,
Fifty thousand horse and foot going to Table Bay,'

but Vicky's babies preferred a song about honeysuckle and a bee, which all the barrel organs played after 'Dolly Grey', which was a dismal kind of tune. They responded better when their Aunt Maud sang 'Soldiers of the Queen'.

Georgiana heard none of these, for Charles was ill and, in the black week of December 1899, when at Stormberg, Magersfontein, and Colenso, England suffered disaster, he left her to finish her life alone. No one now alive had ever seen her cry, but Charles, struggling for breath, felt tears on the hand she held.

'Do not leave me, Charles,' she whispered.

He drew a difficult breath. 'You can manage better than I could, dear love. You have others. I never had anyone but you.'

'Oh, Charles, Charles,' she sobbed in anguish. But Charles had gone.

Maud took charge, but there was, she knew, no comfort to give, except to say that it could not be a long parting, and that she could not bring herself to say because it would leave *her* unfriended. Maud was wrestling with her own dark trouble. Michael had suddenly thought that a little heroism might wash out his offence and had unexpectedly arrived from Paris to enlist in the C.I.V.; a hero off to the wars, to shed his blood for his country, might reasonably expect a little affection from his wife. Shuddering, struggling with a feeling of physical nausea, Maud yielded. He was coarser than he had been, more repulsive to her than he had been before his flight, but he was offering his life for his country, and she, who had shouted her patriotism to the world, was his wife. How could she repulse him?

In a raw yellow fog, through which the khaki-clad figures loomed like ghosts, she saw a detachment of the C.I.V. off

from Victoria. The press of the swaying, shouting crowd was terrifying; Maud, afraid that she was going to be sick, detached herself from her husband's embrace and waved her hand bleakly as he strode down the platform.

'They'll all be killed,' sobbed a middle-aged woman at her side, and Maud, horrified at herself, found her heart saying 'I hope so'. Her conscious mind withdrew that hope hurriedly, and she soon realized, with utter dread, that in any case that would not be the end of him. She was going to have a child, and the knowledge filled her with loathing.

The news, however, had a remarkable effect upon her grandmother. Georgiana had suddenly grown old; the threads of life slipped through her fingers; she would let things go. How could she live without Charles? Then she found that Maud needed her; Charles had been right; she had other ties.

Georgie was born early on a winter morning in 1900, just before the new century opened, though the argument about the first year of a new century was still raging, as Georgiana remembered hearing her mother say that it had raged a hundred years before.

The wretched, disillusioning war went on, the national strain releasing itself in a burst of terrifying mob hysteria when Mafeking was relieved. Frank Grant was killed that autumn in some absurd, ill-managed sortie. Alex nearly broke her heart over it, though everyone else seemed to have forgotten Frank; she rushed over to London to see about a formal adoption of his boy, Ronnie, in case the child might turn out to be illegitimate after all.

Alex liked Georgie much better than any of Vicky's rampageous children; the baby had something about her that promised an interesting future, an 'aura' they called it nowadays.

The nineteenth century ended at last. Georgiana saw it out, sitting in her high backed chair, with her granddaughter on a stool at her feet and her great-granddaughter in a cradle beside her.

'What will the new century be like?' mused Maud.

'Very much like the old century, I shouldn't wonder, as far as essentials are concerned,' said Georgiana. 'Though I daresay there will be some more remarkable scientific inventions like this wireless which Marconi has just unloosed upon the world. But the main thing, human nature, don't change much; a swing of the pendulum to the left, and a swing of the pendulum to the right, a different rhythm, and then back to the original starting place of the swing.'

It was impossible to believe that things would be the same, though, when the Queen was dead. They heard that she was sinking, and a sigh of dismay ran through all England. What would the country be like without the Queen? She had lived to see the relief of Mafeking and Ladysmith, but not to be quite sure of the end of the war; the feeling of instability which the defeats had brought to England had shaken her, and the sceptre which she had held so firmly slipped from her grasp.

Incredible as it seemed, the Queen was dying; the pillars of the State were shaken; would the structure come toppling down? To most people she was an Institution; it was as if one said 'England will turn over and show another face to the sky', as if the world had paused a moment on its axis. But to Georgiana, who could remember very well the time before she came to the throne and could still, over the long years, find much virtue in that time, it was much less startling. She said tranquilly, heretically: 'Poor old lady; she will be missed, but I believe the Government has passed into far more capable hands. The Prince - King, I should say - has the easy, agreeable manners of the Guelphs, not the stiff ones of the Coburgs; he will make things easier for us abroad. I don't think England has ever been so unpopular as she has been these last few years.'

This sounded like heresy, but Georgiana was privileged. The scenes shifted, the figures came and went; she had watched so many of them: by almost imperceptible stages the Georgian era had merged into the Victorian, and now, although Victoria

still lingered, one might confess that the Edwardian had begun some time before, for though the old lady at Osborne had clung tenaciously to her sceptre, her unfortunate eldest son set the fashions, led the *ton*; it was all the empire she allowed him and she sneered at that: but it counted. Victoria despised and condemned the Edwardian outlook, but Georgiana was more tolerant, and viewed it much as she had viewed the Georgian world which Victoria had forgotten, though she had once been so fascinated by that prince of late Georgians, Lord Melbourne. Georgiana chuckled when she remembered the young Queen, but Victoria herself seemed to have forgotten. How imperceptibly things changed; the young generation of one age faded into the older generation of the next, and then they both vanished and left only such ghosts of the past as the Queen and herself.

The Queen's death affected Emily far more than it did her mother; she had identified herself so completely with mid-Victorian ideals that the end of the era shocked her into the feeling that it was time she ended, too. She had failed to reach her goal; all her happiness had been tinged with bitterness; she had never savoured sweet and simple joys; she was out of sympathy with her children and with her circumstances. Life had buffeted her, but death was kind and called her as she slept..

CHAPTER VI

EVERYWHERE people ping-ponged, and the Press talked of 'the Ping-Pong spirit' in which Great Britain finished the war; clergymen, as is their way, embroidered the theme in their pulpits. The main thing, however, was that the war *had* come to an end and one could give the whole of one's attention to the new occupation of motoring.

Georgiana watched with interest, but quite calmly, the revolution in transport as she had watched so many revolutions; she had seen candles displaced by gas; she saw gas ousted by electricity, as the stage coach had been displaced by the train. She had seen the birth of the train, the omnibus, the telephone, the bicycle, the gramophone, the motor car. She had taken an early ride in the 'Tu'penny Tube', as she had taken an early ride in the Manchester railway train, and, of course, she rode in a motor car, one of the first that ventured on the English roads, travelling four miles an hour behind a man carrying a red flag to warn drivers of horses. She thoroughly approved of modern conveniences and was always looking forward to the time when the venturesome experimenters would really learn to fly.

Life still held pleasure for her, since her interest in the world was still acute; and she was still needed, her old eyes told her that. Michael Font returned from South Africa in 1904. He had escaped without a scratch during the war, and subsequent adventures in the goldfields had done a good deal to repair his general health; in an outdoor life, however rackety, he retained some semblance of virility and will-power. He returned to England with the notion that he would give normal life a trial and settle down as a householder and husband.

It was hopeless, of course; his wife could not always hide her

shrinking, and fatherhood held no compensation for him. He considered such joys were overrated and flitted to Paris again in 1905, leaving his wife, without a word, to make the best bargain with life that she could for herself and her children. This time he did not return. Alex heard rumours of him, and even caught occasional glimpses of a bloated, repulsive creature whom she pointed out as her brother-in-law and whom she made spasmodic efforts to reform.

'He'll drink himself to death,' she said viciously after one failure. 'And I hope he'll do it soon.'

But responsibility sat hardly on Alex; she felt that she ought to do what she could for him, and when she found that no one had seen anything of him for six months, she combed Paris for him and then sent for Stephen Blane.

What fear lurked in Michael's absinthe-maddened brain? What had he done to make him hide? For some reason he thought that the police were seeking him, and when his fear grew intolerable he threw himself into the river. Stephen identified his body in the Morgue, buried him decently and agreed with Alex that it was a blessing.

'Heaven prosper your wooing, Stephen,' Alex said.

The *Daily Mail* offered a £10,000 prize for the first flight from London to Manchester in 1906. Georgiana was tremendously interested in flight. She was a hundred and two years old and anxious to be gone now. Maud was happy with Stephen; the Liberals were in and she had never liked them; the Abbey Theatre players were taking London by storm, but she was too old to go to the theatre; England was in the grip of a severe attack of pageantitis, but she had seen an immense amount of the pageantry of life.

She sat still, now, and let the world come to her; her little great-granddaughter sat on the stool at her feet which had been Maud's. She was a little deaf, and she moved stiffly with a long ebony cane with a handle like a shepherd's crook. She dozed a good deal, but when she woke she was, mentally,

as alert as ever, and she told her great-granddaughter very animated tales. She would have enjoyed watching Maud's Georgie grow up, but that was the only desire that might have kept her; she had lost all vital interest when she lost Charles. She lived a great deal in the past, though she was fully aware of the present.

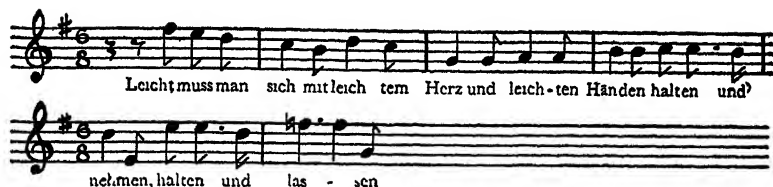
'I live in the eighteenth century, my dear,' she said drowsily to Maud on an October evening in 1907. 'Powder and rats, scandal and wits, Sheridan and Fox and Pitt. Oh! what a man Pitt was. We shall never see his like again.'

'Grandmamma,' cried Maud anxiously, with a quiver in her voice. Surely the old lady was wandering; she often talked of the past, but never as oddly as this. 'Grandmamma,' she cried again.

'Coming, Caroline,' said Georgiana, and opened her eyes with one of her brilliant smiles.

GEORGIE AND JOAN

Richard Strauss: *Der Rosenkavalier*



Leicht muss man sich,
Mit leichtem Herz,
Und leichten Händen
Halten und nehmen,
Halten und lassen.

CHAPTER I

GEORGIE kept some private memories from very early years, most of them connected with her great-grandmother, for whom she had a shy adoration, but her first public one was of 'The Big and Little Loaf' and the Chinese Labour arguments of the 1906 General Election, which produced extraordinarily exciting posters. The family was, as a rule, lukewarm about politics, but each member seemed to catch the prevailing fever during that particular election; from firm Tories they were converted to Liberalism, carried, presumably, and quite unconsciously, by the political pendulum in its inevitable swing.

Maud and Stephen made up a family party with Vicky and her husband and set out for the new open space, which had taken the place of the slums, at Aldwych, where the results were to be put up on a great screen with coloured lights. Georgie and her cousin Peter had little clackers out of which they extracted a great deal of most enjoyable noise as the results went up. Georgie was entranced by the night excursion, the exhilarating crowd, the noise, the coloured lights; she closed her eyes and opened them again to gaze in ecstasy at the rockets and blue flares like flowers, but bright and shiny, against the sky. She was glad the Liberals got in since they had given her such vivid pleasure, but her elders said, after a year or two, that this Government was like all Governments, liberal in promises and laggard in performance; most of its energy seemed used up in its struggle with the House of Lords.

Georgie's interest in politics was chiefly confined to Mr. Lloyd George and his stamps. 'Ninepence for fourpence, indeed,' they scoffed in the kitchen, and the parlourmaid had a song which began:

GEORGIE AND JOAN 1906 - 1932

'Oh! Mr. Lloyd George what'll you do for me?
It's a stamp for this, and a stamp for that,
A stamp for the dog and a stamp for the cat,'

and ended:

'He's going to give us fivepence a week
And lick our stamps as well.'

All the milestones in Georgie's youth seemed to be marked by popular songs; barrel-organs and phonographs took care that everyone should know which songs *were* popular; faint echoes of 'The Honeysuckle and the Bee' were drowned by 'I wouldn't leave my little wooden hut for you', 'All the nice girls love a sailor' and 'Swing me just a little bit higher, Obadiah, do', over which Joan disgraced herself by singing it at the top of her voice in church while the rest of the congregation struggled less enthusiastically with 'Rock of Ages'.

The Edwardian era ended on the more soulful note of 'In the Shadows', for which Georgie had invented some dance steps of her own which she exhibited before an admiring audience in her mother's drawing-room. Maud, remembering her own repression, was very determined that her children should not be repressed. Their elders listened indulgently while Georgie, Peter and Ronnie argued hotly about the respective merits of Commander Peary and Doctor Cook, who both maintained that they had discovered the North Pole, though it turned out that only the Commander had done so. There was no argument when news came of Robert Falcon Scott's fate in the Antarctic, only a little discussion as to whether he or Captain Oates was the bravest.

Children had much more liberty than they used to do, Maud and Vicky were agreed. 'And a good thing, too,' added Vicky, who spoilt hers shockingly.

Vicky was a very resplendent matron these days, with abundant curves, very elegantly upholstered, and a red gold

head on which tight little puffs and curls climbed skyward in terraces. She was handsome and merry and kind, and her silliness did not matter any longer since it only rambled into the talk about children and servants and bridge which was the common coin among her friends; wit would have been altogether superfluous; it was unwanted even in Maud's more intellectual circle. Vicky's greatest fault, from her children's point of view, was her devotion to bridge. When they required her undivided attention they would often hear 'Run away, children, we're playing cards', or 'Come here, Doris (or Sandra). Mrs. Jones has fallen out and we want a fourth for bridge'. A sighing daughter would reluctantly drag up a chair and, with attention wandering to the dying daylight, play a shockingly bad game. So, a hundred and fifty years earlier, had their great-great-grandmother Charlotte played casino.

Alex came and went, a little satirical about her sisters' domesticity, but friendly and amusing. They were always glad to see her and Ronnie, and explained away a great deal that seemed to need explaining, with some pride, as 'artistic and, therefore, of course, a little odd'.

'Respectability', that key word of Victorianism, had sunk into disrepute, though many still practised the quality to which, generally, it was supposed to refer. The King certainly observed the Sabbath with some strictness – the British Sunday was an institution and therefore must be kept up – but otherwise he enlarged the limits of permissible behaviour.

Maud hung between the eras; she approved of Prison Reform and Clean Milk, but not of Divorce Reform and Mr. Eustace Miles's Views on Food; she thought chaperones indispensable for young girls at dances, but was inclined to think they might sometimes be dispensed with in the daytime, sharing a common delusion that sinners only exercise their talents after dark.

The momentary instability of the first years of the century had passed and left the Victorian calm apparently unshaken,

indeed pleasantly increased, for King Edward's charming manners had made England popular in France, and, since France was the hereditary enemy, that obviously meant a perpetual peace. His absurd nephew, the Kaiser, was sometimes troublesome, but his antics were only those of a swollen-headed boy. There were cordial exchanges with Russia as well as with France, and the Peace of Europe, except in those troublesome Balkan States which didn't count, was very secure indeed. King Edward, his youthful dissipations looking far less black now, was distinctly an asset as a King; his reign unrolled as a splendid pageant, though it only endured nine years; still King George, though quieter and much less given to pageantry, would carry on in the same way, of course, if with less splendour.

But would he? There seemed to be a number of little black clouds in the fair blue sky. Maud, from long association with Georgiana and Charles, was politically weather-wise. Wasn't the Kaiser carrying his ridiculous antics a little too far for safety? It did not matter so much in England, which always made allowances for buffoons, but France's sense of humour was quite different. There was trouble, an incident which might have produced very ugly consequences, at a place called Agadir, of which most people had never heard. Morocco, was it? Wasn't it in Morocco that the Kaiser had made himself ridiculous before? Place called Tangier, wasn't it? He seemed to have an Oriental tilt to his mind. Hadn't he gone on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem riding on a donkey? Or clad in shining armour, was it? Something, at any rate, very theatrical and absurd. France did not like it, and no one wanted France and Germany to be flying at each other's throats, 'too upsettin'', 'interfere with the Twelfth', said Stephen's friends. The Government had better give him a hint that England wouldn't stand for it, a jocular reminder that the English fleet could blow all his ships out of the sea.

The Under-Secretary to whom this advice was given must

INCIDENT AT AGADIR 1911

have passed it on; the hint was given and seemed enough; no more was heard of Agadir. Maud took the children to Broadstairs, and Stephen went north with the Under-Secretary on the Twelfth.

The quiet, prosperous years rolled on. Aeroplanes crossed the Channel, the Bioscope had become an everyday affair; the children had a great deal of fun on roller skates; the hobble skirt came in, and monstrous 'Merry Widow' hats, and Mr. Bernard Shaw became almost insultingly famous through the 'Chocolate Soldier' waltz.

There were some very good years for young people, a wonderful summer in 1911, militant suffragettes, a big transport strike and an even more unsettling coal strike, a really promising conspiracy in Ireland and some excellent tunes, 'Yip i addy i ay' and the new syncopated ones from America, of which the best was certainly 'Alexander's Ragtime Band'.

They were noisy, silly, empty years, but cheerful, with only the loss of the *Titanic* and some Balkan wars to upset the general calm. Alex learnt to paint futuristically, and took a hesitating, but amused, Maud to Bohemian night-clubs and astonishing picture shows of cubes and triangles, which she described, very divertingly, to Stephen's business friends. London seemed to have 'gone Russian'; everyone prattled of Dostoevski and Turgeniev, and went to the Russian ballet; Pavlova danced, and, at a matinée, Georgie watched her, entranced, with tears running down her cheeks. Georgie was growing too emotional; it was time, Stephen said, that she went to boarding school to be hardened a bit.

His faith in schools, Georgie thought a year or two later, was touching and rather pathetic. Far from checking her emotional tendency, it increased it; for she fell at once into a *grande passion* for her music mistress, and lingered in passages and behind doors to catch a fleeting glimpse of the beloved when she should have been more profitably employed; not that Stephen suspected this, for it was obviously impossible to discuss

so sweet and secret a delight with commonplace people like parents; *they* required good reports and prowess at hockey, not excursions into the seventh heaven.

Georgie managed to give satisfaction in those side-lines, chiefly because she thought it imperative to beat her cousin Peter, who despised her bowling and described her tennis as 'pat ball'.

Stephen Blane was almost morbidly conscientious where his stepdaughters were concerned; he had a feeling that Nature had not given them a fair deal and that he must make up to them for it. Georgie did not appear to him to present a great problem; school training and maturity would doubtless cure her emotionalism, and there was between her and her mother an affection so deep, so sympathetic, that there was little danger of the child being seriously misunderstood. It was Joan who presented the problem, and Stephen found it a bewildering one, as much on his wife's account as on the child's. Maud disliked the girl; though she struggled to conceal it, though she protested vehemently that it was not so, her involuntary shrinking was obvious to all observant eyes, including Joan's. Georgiana might have understood it, but not even to her grandmother had Maud revealed the horror with which she had awaited the births of her children, and even had she done so, it would have been impossible to explain how that horror had been transformed into passionate remorseful tenderness for one child and shrinking distaste for the other. She could not account for it herself and so dismissed it, and lavished on the unloved child an unfair proportion of material gifts, a gesture which deceived nobody - a kiss for Georgie and a present for Joan. At eight Joan was wistful at the distance between her and her mother; Georgie was puzzled; Stephen concerned; and Maud struggled with a feeling over which she seemed to have no control. It was the only shadow in an exceptionally happy home, and was not, in those early years, much of a shadow, since Stephen's affection amply consoled Joan for her mother's

A BOMB AT SARAJEVO 1914

coolness, and she was naturally a remarkably self-contained child, disliking caresses.

'Do you think it would be a good plan to send Joan back to school with Georgie, next September?' Stephen asked his wife in the summer of 1914.

'If you think so, Stephen. I daresay they would like to be together, and Joan is lonely at home. Sheila's too small to be much of a companion. Yes, I believe it would be a good plan. Do you like this hobble skirt? I'm inclined to think it's too tight for decency.' Stephen thought so too.

Georgie was delighted at the idea of having Joan with her at school – not that she would have much time for the kid, since, by dint of superhuman efforts she had just managed to get into the cricket eleven. She read her mother's letter and tucked it into her blouse, as she made a dash for the new copy of the *Illustrated London News*, which was their only contact with the world of affairs, authority having decided that newspapers were subversive. Georgie secured it.

'It's a long way to Tipperary,
It's a long way to go,'

she hummed as she turned the pages, and with her elbow thrust back predatory hands. 'Where's Sarajevo?' she asked.

'Heaven knows. Why?'

'Oh, nothing. Only someone's been throwing bombs.'

She went on humming:

'Come over here, come over here.
Alexander's Rag-time Band.'

CHAPTER II

'It's absurd,' said Georgie, in 1917, 'to keep me at school any longer. I'm grown up. There's not much more to learn after one's been in the sixth for a year. And to tell you the truth, mummy,' she added artfully, 'we don't really get enough to eat.'

That settled the matter, of course. Maud was horrified that her child should be underfed. 'Joan's all right,' Georgie added casually, 'they give the kids extra rations and plenty of milk, but we are supposed to be old enough to suffer for our country.'

'My dearest child, don't talk like that. You ought, of course, to go to a finishing school, but the Continent's obviously out of the question. I wonder what would be the wisest thing to do?' Maud had acquired the reprehensible modern habit of taking her children into her confidence.

'Send me down to help Aunt Vicky,' said Georgie promptly. Maud was doubtful. Vicky had taken bustling, efficient control of a canteen, and with two or three pretty girls to help her, had made a sensational success of it. 'Vicky's Matrimonial Bureau', the family called it, with some justice, since she had married off four of her assistants, including two of her daughters, very successfully to dashing young soldiers, whose after-the-war prospects had borne her shrewd scrutiny, and had rescued another one from an imprudent marriage with an equally dashing young man who had no prospects at all; Vicky was pleasant, but very firm with 'temporary gentlemen'.

'Please, mother,' pleaded Georgie. Maud could never resist that tone. 'I'll write,' she promised.

'If I were the only girl in the world,
And you were the only boy,'

sang Georgie as she packed. Her cousin Peter, on his last leave before being sent to France, drifted in and took up the tune:

‘“There would be such wonderful things to do,
I would say such wonderful things to you.”’

What about it, Georgie?

He had his arm round her shoulders, and she looked up, startled, into eager eyes. She adored Peter, always had done. Her lips met his in a kiss of a kind she had not yet experienced; she did not like it, and pushed him away.

‘Don’t be an ass, Peter,’ she gasped uncertainly, gazing at him in bewilderment. She *did* adore him, but – but what? She did not know, only he had always been like a brother, and, vaguely, she felt she liked him best like that. But Peter was not feeling brotherly; he cared not at all if she were a ‘rabbit’ at cricket, and could only play pat-ball.

‘Marry me, Georgie, when I get some leave.’

‘Wait till then, Peter,’ she said soberly. ‘It’s no good rushing at things like a bull at a gate. I believe it only just came into your mind.’

‘When I saw you bending over that case, and singing “The only girl in the World”,’ Peter confessed, ‘I knew you were.’

It was thrilling, of course, to have a lover at the front, even if the family supported one’s secret inclination, and refused to hear of an engagement. Every day during the slack hours at the canteen, Georgie struggled with a refractory fountain pen, which seemed determined to find nothing to say to Peter. She had always written him long letters, now she could only manage a few lines: ‘No time for more,’ she always ended. ‘There is a clatter of customers at the door.’ But the clatter was often only made by one customer, and Georgie never mentioned *him* to Peter.

Shorncliffe was a vast Canadian camp in 1917, and Georgie, because of Stephen, who had been born in Montreal, had a

very soft spot for Canadians. She loved the work, the constant bustle of soldiers coming and going, the clatter of cups, the hissing of the urns, the bugles which divided her day like the hands of the clock.

'Three teas, a pork and beans, a slice of pie and two cocoas, miss.' With deft fingers she would pile the order on the counter.

'Do you eat pork and beans with your cocoa?'

'Sure,' came the sheepish answer.

They were not all sheepish; they had love affairs to confide, and advice to ask about babies, tobacco, and English coins. Sometimes she must help to compile a letter, sometimes prescribe a dose of Epsom salts; she was mother and confessor, waitress and nursemaid to a constantly flowing stream of more than a thousand men. Often they gave intimate confidences, meaning no harm, but very disconcerting to her inexperience; sometimes they were very drunk, and more like beasts than men.

'Go into the kitchen,' Aunt Vicky would cry, sharply, and the door was locked upon the girls, while the elder women dealt with drunken riots deftly, tactfully, so that the redcaps need not be called in. After such a night there would be embarrassed callers.

'Hope I didn't say anything I shouldn't have last night, Miss.'

'You did, Sinky. Don't do it again, or we'll have to throw you out.'

'I won't. I swear it. I went into Folkestone with some of the boys.'

'Well stay here to-night, out of mischief. There's a sing-song.'

Through the thick fog of tobacco smoke, and the acrid fumes of the stove two hundred or more faces loomed mistily, mouths open, roaring the choruses of their favourite songs. Georgie knew them all; 'There's a long long trail a-winding', 'Pack up your troubles in your old Kit Bag', 'Mother Machree', 'What do we want with Eggs and Ham, when we've got plum and apple Jam?' and then a sentimentalist would throw into a

momentary silence 'Annie Laurie', or the 'Bonnie Bonnie Banks of Loch Lomond', and the roar would die down to give the soloist a chance.

Georgie loved sing-songs, and, for the most part, she loved her boys, but sometimes an outsider would drift in, an officer from another unit, who knew nothing of this happy family and its code of behaviour.

Georgie looked up from her shelves one evening to see a tall, bad-tempered looking man in captain's uniform staring at her offensively. 'Give me twenty Players,' he said. She handed them to him, and he threw down some coins and turned on his heel. Georgie flushed, suddenly resentful of his insolence.

'Come back,' she called clearly. He turned in surprise.

'Pick up those coins. Give me the correct amount, and put the rest in the poor box. We are voluntary workers and don't take tips, as you should have learnt by this time.' He hesitated, angry and uncomfortable, then sheepishly did as he was told, muttering, 'I don't understand this iron money.' Georgie, bright-eyed, picked up the bar of chocolate she had been nibbling.

'Never mind him, miss,' said one of the soldiers at the counter. 'Lots of our officers don't know any better. That one sells biscuits at home, and puts sand in his sugar.'

She smiled at him. 'I know, Sinky, but they sometimes make me mad.'

Sinky and his pal went away with their cups, singing happily:

'Are you from Dixie? Are you from Dixie?
Well I'm from Dixie, too.'

Georgie looked up inquiringly into a face she did not know. 'You're new, aren't you?' she asked.

'Just back from leave,' he smiled at her. 'Do you often have impertinent puppies in here?'

'Not often. It's not the tip I minded. Anyone might make a

mistake. It's the way they do it – as if waitresses were mud. Sinky buys me chocolate and presents it in the most delightful way.'

'Who is Sinky?'

'To tell you the truth, I don't know whether his name is Sinclair, or if it's a nickname because he's always suffering from "that sinking feeling", and needs nourishment. Which is it, Sinky?'

Private Sinclair, presenting an empty cup to be refilled, grinned self-consciously.

'Some of each, miss,' said his companion, slyly.

'Will you give Jock some gaspers, please, miss,' Sinky put in. 'He'll be off to France in the morning, and pushing up daisies next week.'

'Don't you listen to him, Jock. You'll be back here in six months, on more leave. You're always wangling leave, you two.'

They went away chuckling. 'Do you like it here?' asked the stranger, curiously.

'Rather,' said Georgie, 'It's a jolly camp. What part of Canada do you come from?'

'Are you from Dixie? Are you from Dixie?'

Well, I'm from Dixie, too'

came the chorus in crescendo.

'That's right. The song describes it,' answered the stranger.

'What, a Yankee!' His comical face of horror made her laugh. 'I ought to have known better,' she acknowledged, 'especially as, in a way, I'm a fellow countryman. My stepfather comes from Maryland.'

Sinky's nose was out of joint. John Randolph Bryant's was in. The men chaffed Georgie about it.

'Who's the guy you're hiding pie for?' they asked.

'Your elders, boys,' she answered, cheerfully, flushing a little, so that some of them guffawed.

GEORGIE AND JOAN 1906 - 1932

He *was* older, though still young, but it would not do to make too obvious a favourite of him.

'You mustn't spend all your time propping up this counter, John Bryant,' she said severely, but relented to add softly 'At four o'clock we sometimes have friends to tea behind the kitchen.'

'May I come to-morrow?' he asked promptly.

'If Aunt Vicky says you may,' she said demurely.

John Bryant turned the corner of the canteen and paused before he had been seen. The bright June sunshine flickered over as charming a picture as any he had seen in the days of long ago, before a tragic mistake and two years of slaughter and noise and mud, had cut a deep chasm between him and all pleasant things. The leaves rustled softly in a south breeze, rooks cawed overhead, a cow lowed in the distance, in a cottage garden across the road hens were clucking, and huge cabbage roses threw out a strong and lovely scent. Beneath the tree behind the canteen kitchen a girl sat in a deck chair shelling peas. Georgie had discarded her overall and the little black velvet cap she wore in the canteen; in her blue linen frock and shady hat she called up visions of all the pretty girls he had punted up the river in the summer of 1914. *This* was the England for which men fought and died.

Georgie looked up and smiled. 'Come and sit down, Mr. Bryant. Aunt Vicky and tea will be here in a moment. You'll forgive me for going on with my chores. We can't afford to waste time. Aunt Vicky's checking tins.'

John Bryant sipped his tea to make it last longer. What excuse could he offer for entering this paradise every afternoon? Aunt Vicky, casting a shrewd glance at him, gave him an opening.

'These damned ledgers,' she said viciously.

'I'm a first rate book-keeper,' he said persuasively. 'I suppose you wouldn't let me exercise my skill on you?'

'Wouldn't I?' said Vicky promptly 'It's the bookwork we all

loathe. Making up accounts after we close at ten o'clock is worse than an air raid.'

June melted into July, and July into August. John Bryant, a little ashamed of himself, was consistently swinging the lead. 'Not this draft, I'll go with the next,' he promised himself. But the M.O. was a friend of his, and somehow he did not go.

'I'm going into Folkestone to-morrow,' said Georgie in the middle of August.

'Why, so am I,' said Bryant, promptly, 'I suppose you wouldn't have tea with me?'

'*Verboten*, John Bryant. Aunt Vicky doesn't allow it. I might see you at the station, unless you are waiting for the last train?'

John Bryant was not. They sat in opposite corners of the railway carriage, and talked, and looked, and looked away. The train stopped with a jerk. Georgie jumped up and sprang on to the platform. Bryant followed her. The train moved slowly out of the station.

'Why, it's Sandling!' Georgie cried, dismayed, 'I thought it was Westernhanger.'

'Why, so did I,' said John.

She looked at him suspiciously. There was no train for two hours, no train back to Folkestone. Nothing to do but walk.

The August moon rode high in an indigo sky; over the fields brooded a deep silence. Was there death and desolation a few miles away? The roar of guns, horror and fear? That was a lifetime away. There was nothing real but beauty and peace and love. He made an effort to play the game. He talked of Virginia and his Canadian mother, of Montreal, and McGill, where he had been educated, of medicine, which he had begun to study in New York, of a wild night after which he and a Yankee pal had slipped over the border and enlisted in Montreal; but he did not tell her of a wilder night, after which he had got married to a girl of whom he then knew nothing, but of whom he had been learning a great deal that was discredit-

able ever since; that was not a tale for the ears of this exquisite child.

The long road stretched ahead, silvery white under the moon. Georgie had gone to town in high-heeled shoes; she caught one in the rut left by a lorry, and stumbled. John's arm caught her. To play the game? *Qui bono?* To-morrow we are dead. His arms did not loose her; she did not want them to.

Remorse nagged at him during the night. In the morning his friend the M.O. reported him fit for the next draft. 'She is so young, she will forget me,' he thought. He had said nothing about marriage, and Georgie, conscience-stricken on account of Peter, had no desire to flourish an engagement in Aunt Vicky's face. But love cannot be concealed by a tell-tale seventeen year old face, which flushed and paled with every emotion; and tears could not be hidden when the girl stood at her window and watched the draft marching down the road to Folkestone and the sea. Gay and gallant in their dusty khaki, with young voices roaring a song, the draft went by. It should have been a grand theme - 'Land of Hope and Glory', or something equally noble and fine, but the men marched better to:

'Oh, Oh, Oh, it's a lovely war,
What do we want with eggs and ham,
When we've got plum and apple jam.'

CHAPTER III

A LITTLE pile of field postcards, less than a dozen of them, was all that remained of Georgie's romance a week after the armistice was signed, except a scar on her heart which no passage of time would heal. John Bryant had thought that she would forget, had been sure that he would be killed, but he found that her memory was long, and death had not claimed him when the maroons sounded at 11 o'clock on November 11th, 1918. John Bryant went mad with the rest of the world that day, but on the next he sat down to write the truth to Georgie. There was no hope for the future, that he could see, for his marriage, though a tragic farce, was perfectly legal, and his French-Canadian mother had brought him up as rigid a Roman Catholic, as far as divorce was concerned, as she was herself; he was not going back to his wife, but neither was he able to free himself from her.

Georgie could see no sense in it; thoroughly unsatisfactory marriages were much better dissolved. She found herself beating against a granite wall, and was too proud to show her wounds. She tied up the letter with the field postcards, and put them at the bottom of a drawer; Well, that was that; what to do now?

Peter had been killed at Ypres that spring; Ronnie had been badly wounded at Verdun. Aunt Vicky was needed at home. Aunt Alex wanted Georgie in Paris. Georgie crossed on the first available boat to France.

Paris was herself again; gaiety seemed to have returned to the world at a wave of a magic wand. The lights went up, flags fluttered in the streets, the cafés were crowded, any excuse was good enough for a celebration. The dark breast of the Seine glittered again with a myriad jewelled lights, the spirit of

fireworks crackled on the boulevards: 'Vive la France', 'Vive l'Angleterre', 'Vive l'Amérique'; but not 'Vive la Russie'. Something had gone very wrong with the Russian Bear; the steam roller had rolled backwards, and crushed, not only the Tzar and his family, but the moderate Kerensky as well. Russia, however, was the only shadow on the Allies' brightness.

There was something exciting to see every day. There were visits of Allied Monarchs. Georgie stood in a crowd, one drizzling afternoon, to watch the King drive across the Pont Alexandre III, to the Quai D'Orsay, together with Poincaré and Clemenceau, and followed by the Princes, looking very clean and shy. Georgie dived back into her memories of her great-grandmother: she had heard old Georgiana talk of her lively sister Caroline's visit to Paris after Waterloo - more than a century bridged by the memories of two people; rather remarkable, that was, since the memories were of so similar a scene.

King Albert of Belgium was the next to arrive. 'Indomitable'. More perhaps than any one other figure he typified the heroism of the War; after all, it was he, with his comic opera army in red trousers, who had checked the field grey wave and won the war. The crowd shouted 'Vive le Roi Albert', and roared 'La Brabançonne'.

If King Albert awoke such emotion that a lump stuck in one's throat, President Wilson stirred a livelier curiosity. The tall King of Italy, was, perhaps, a more imposing figure, but President Wilson was God - the Saviour of the World, the Prince of Peace, with his marvellous League of Nations scheme, and doctrine of Peace and Goodwill among men. What matter that his appearance was disappointing, the schoolmaster, rigid, cold; what matter that there were more highly coloured delegates, Lloyd George, Venezelos, Clemenceau, the Emir Feisal, it was Wilson who held the world in the hollow of his hand. Rather wonderful, really, Georgie thought, as she watched the

armies of secretaries and typists who trailed in the wake of these saviours of the world.

Great-aunt Caroline had ridden in the forefront, with the Princes, but Georgie elbowed her way through the crowd, and trudged on foot to Montparnasse, and soon forgot peace conferences; one might be caught up into a noble selfless emotion for a time, but private misery soon returned to nag and mock. Ronnie was recovering from his physical wound, though he would limp for the rest of his life, but Georgie would go maimed for ever. How did one bear it? Life was a continual anguish. She must tear him out of her heart and thoughts, but how? If the war had lasted, it would have been easier, because there was so much to do, but now she had so much time on her hands, so much time to brood on love and illusions, on women's foolish trustfulness and men's irresponsibility. She knew John Bryant had treated her selfishly, but her heart made excuses for him, and because she could not bear to hear him blamed, she would not mention him at all. She was shut up in herself, writhing in anguish, impossible to comfort.

Her mother knew very little of the affair, and suspected merely that the child had given her heart unasked. Aunt Vicky had been surprisingly discreet, and her perennial optimism hoped that things would come right in the end; she kept in touch with John Bryant, and would sometimes, when alone with her niece, drop a casual remark: 'I had a letter from John Bryant last week. He took his medical degree, you know, and is doing research on a serum, or something odd and unpleasant like that. He's built a laboratory in Italy, somewhere on Mount Mottarone, I believe.'

Georgie was silent, and Vicky, after a pause, moved on to her persistent lamentation about her daughter Doris, who had married in haste but had no intention of repenting at leisure; divorce, short and sharp, was her remedy, and she laughed hilariously when it was suggested that she might consider the family.

'Victorian bunkum, mother,' she said cheerfully. 'One only has one life and one has to live it oneself.'

Doris had a very public, very exciting, divorce, full of spicy details which greatly entertained her friends, who flocked to the court and giggled so much that the learned judge rebuked them very scathingly.

Why could not John get a divorce? thought Georgie. He had more than enough evidence. What was the hold which religion seemed to have over some people? She wandered into dark and empty churches in search of the answer, and, not finding it, fell on her knees with a cry so anguished that one might have thought He could not have heard it unmoved. 'God, Oh God, if you are there, help me. Give me my love or give me peace.'

She did find some comfort in the incense laden atmosphere of John's own church, but not much. The world was always being beckoned by some new prophet; she followed them all a little bit of the way, but not far. Spiritualism was the most successful, for into her sceptical ears one medium poured a really hopeful suggestion: 'There was an elderly, whiskered gentleman in striped trousers, who was very anxious to help her. He had travelled a great deal and brought a message from a very old lady.' This was exciting. Had old Georgiana continued to take an interest in her? But alas, the spirit's name was James, not Charles; and Charles, now she came to think of it, had declined to grow whiskers. Georgie gave it up. There was nothing in religion for her, and nothing in love, nothing anywhere in fact; all life was futile.

She was listless, and idled away her time; she lounged and ate chocolates, and was untidy and unpunctual; she had a great many books from Mudie's, but she never seemed to finish any of them, and a week later had forgotten their names; the only novel which seemed to impress her was Mr. Michael Arlen's *Green Hat*, which her mother thought immoral and vulgar. She went to all the new plays, and yawned through

them, even through Noel Coward's, and seemed to have no critical faculty at all; the only thing, at any rate, to which she applied it was the clever, acrobatic dancing which Maud did not consider dancing at all. Maud wondered if she were growing deaf, 'or did they all mumble and run their words into each other in an irritating and slovenly fashion?'

'Your hearing is all right, my dear, if mine is,' Stephen reassured her. 'I asked Georgie last night if she could hear what they were saying on the stage. She said she could not, but seemed surprised that anyone should want to. The plays are poor stuff, of course, for the most part, but why do people go if they can't hear a word? Georgie didn't know. This is an odd world we find ourselves in, Maud.'

Georgie sometimes felt a little, rather shoddy, emotion about music, and occasionally about people, but it was shallow, and never lasted; she was enmeshed in egotism, bound upon the wheel of her own misery, with no occupation except that of killing time. Maud's heart was wrung by her daughter's pain. As she watched her dancing at one or other of the fashionable night clubs to which Stephen occasionally took them both, she could have cried out with the pity which filled her, but which she knew she must conceal. What had happened to the agreeable world she had known? It seemed not only lost, but forgotten. In its stead was this perpetual fever; row upon row of creamed, and massaged, and lifted, faces, beneath a mask of powder, with eyes like enamel, and mouths like bleeding wounds, 'calling for madder music and for stronger wine', as young Dowson, whom she had once met, had written of another age. They had talked of decadence in the 'nineties; then it had touched few, now everyone seemed tainted. Little as the scenes outwardly resembled Hogarth's, Maud was reminded of his pictures constantly, as she watched this curious, dance-club world of the elderly and the very young, nymphs and satyrs, Bacchantes and honest fools, all hungry-eyed.

Georgie learned to conceal her feelings rather more success-

fully as the years passed, but though she went about a great deal, and filled her time with cocktail parties, week-ends on the river, night club galas, studio parties, pyjama and bottle parties, treasure hunts, tennis tournaments, tentatively amorous *rendezvous*, her invariable 'That will be fun' was uttered with a face which betrayed the deepest gloom. *Qui bono?* was the only question in this futile world, and no one could supply an answer to it.

With Joan there emerged a new generation, neglected and ill-nourished during war time, defiant, sceptical, a lost generation, neither pre-war, nor post-war, too young to have felt personally involved in it, but too old to have escaped the consciousness of the ghastly mess. Sometimes these children felt that there had been a war ever since they could remember; sometimes that there was no war at all, only a bogey invented to frighten and thwart them; and then a cousin or a friend's elder brother would be blown to bits, and though it was impossible to realize, like trying to imagine one's own death, the fact formed a gloomy background to horrid and inadequate meals. The fever which was destroying the world of its elders was infecting the blood of the generation which must inevitably take its place. One could hardly call it disillusioned, since it never seemed to have had any illusions; it was surfeited with 'hot air' and patriotic vapourings which led nowhere, and at which it hooted in derision. It shouted its freedom from restraint, stripped the last decencies from conversation, and took as its password 'Whoopee!' indeed, its whole conversation was more American than English. Maud often failed to understand a word her daughter said.

Joan and her friends had the strangest, most upsetting, outlook; they said that skyscrapers were more beautiful than Gothic cathedrals, that speed was more important than outworn ideals, that Epstein was a finer sculptor than Phidias, that D. H. Lawrence was a greater genius than Shakespeare - and who read poor old Bill anyway?

Joan was a passionate admirer of D. H. Lawrence, and took her place in the ring of admiring young women who surrounded him when he expounded his gospel, gazing entranced at his deep-set eyes, which flashed like jewels, at his thick, dust-coloured hair, his pointed under lip, fine hands and restless movements. Joan and the other youthful disciples professed to find in him an apostle of liberty, a man with a mission to reveal a new way of life, a way free from hypocrisy and inhibitions, life in all its passionate intensity branching into a dozen exciting paths. Georgie felt distaste for his work and called it neurotic, but added tolerantly, 'Of course, he is ill, poor man.' Maud thought it vile, a shameless study in sex depravity.

'And all this talk of inhibitions, Georgie! What does it mean?'

'Heaven alone knows, mummy; everyone talks the jargon, but I don't suppose anyone understands it, except Messrs. Freud and Jung. You'd better ask Joan.'

But Joan could not discuss complexes with her mother, though she did with Stephen. Stephen's sense of Joan as a problem had been growing into a nightmare, for he perceived, without any of this gabble of complexes, the pit into which she had fallen, and into which she was threatening to drag him.

He had taken her to a performance of Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*, which they had both enjoyed.

'Leicht muss man sich,
Mit leichtem Herz
Und leichten Handen
Halten und nehmen,
Halten und lassen.'

sang Joan softly in the car as they drove home.

'A lovely night! Let's drive down to Brighton, Stephen, instead of going home.'

'Are you proposing an elopement, young woman?'

'Yes, Stephen.' There was no mistaking the passion in her voice; she was shaking with it. 'Take me, Stephen.'

'My dear, dear child,' he began, in deep distress.

'I'm not your dear child, Stephen. I adore you. There isn't a moment of the day or night when I'm not longing for you.'

Stephen picked up the speaking tube, and told the chauffeur to drive them along the Embankment and through the Park. He put his arms round Joan, but when she raised her face to his, he pressed it to his breast. 'You are my dear, my darling child,' he said softly. 'If you had been my own, I could not have loved you more dearly. I have tried to be your father, but it seems I've failed.'

'You haven't, you haven't, Stephen.'

'I must have, darling child, or you would not have got this fantastic notion into your head.'

'It isn't fantastic; it's true.'

'Fantastic it must be, Joan. You're twenty and I'm sixty.'

'What does age matter?'

'An enormous amount, my dear. Besides . . .'

'Oh, don't start being moral.'

'I wasn't going to. I was only going to say, that it takes two for a satisfying love affair.'

'I could make you love me, Stephen. You do, you know you do.'

'Almost any pretty girl who makes up her mind to it can make a fool of an old man, Joan, but it seldom lasts. Old age cannot keep up with youthful ardour, and presently turns sour.'

'You wouldn't, Stephen. I'd make you so happy that all life would seem a dream.'

He smiled wryly in the dark; they passed under a lamp, and Joan looked up and caught the smile. She drew herself out of his arms angrily. 'You're laughing at me - finding me ridiculous. God knows, I'm not that, though I may be wicked.'

Stephen's smile grew broader. This was better. A little dramatizing of oneself blunts the bitterest pangs of thwarted

love. He had been in some danger of losing his head, but the danger was over for the moment.

'I'm quite capable of making a fool of myself, Joan, but when I fell in love with your mother, when I was eighteen, I fell in love for life. Nothing else would last.'

'Let's go home, Stephen. I knew it was no good, really.'

Light must we be
With spirits light
With touch light fingered
Take all our pleasures,
Take them and leave them.'

Stephen did not understand this generation of youth, but he understood it better than Maud did; she was always being horrified and shocked, but Stephen realized that the memories of the war were so disturbing that the young people wanted to drown them with cocktails and the perpetual racket of jazz bands, in case the world's agony should reach them.

'They have found that the fountain of youth
Is a mixture of gin and vermouth,'

said Joan, next morning, when her mother reproved her for keeping late hours and drinking too many cocktails.

Georgie winked at her sister, and walked over to the window. A lovely day! But what could one use it for? Drive the new car down to Guildford? or go to Brooklands with Reggie Gray? or stay at home with Aldous Huxley's new book? or what? Why do anything? A beggar passed in the street, the twentieth she had seen in the last twenty-four hours; he wore a Mons ribbon, and his lips were screwed into a grotesque effort to sing:

'Take a pair of sparkling eyes
And a pair of ruby lips.'

'Oh, my God!'

'Georgie!'

'Sorry, mummy; I wonder they don't all turn Bolshevik and hang the rich from lamp-posts. The *Daily Mail* has a fresh scare about its pet Russian boggy. What a Peace! It's as *ersatz* as the beer the poor devils are given nowadays.'

There was really nothing to say to that, but Stephen, with a pleasant irony, which old Georgiana would have appreciated, read Anatole France's *Penguin Island* to Georgie:

'Vous n'aime pas les Marsouins?'

'Nous les haïssons.'

'Pour quelle raison les haïssez-vous?'

'Vous le demandez? Les Marsouins ne sont ils pas les voisins des Pingouins?'

'Sans doute.'

'Eh bien, c'est pour cela que les Pingouins haïssent les Marsouins.'

'Est-ce une raison?'

'Certainement. Qui dit voisins dit ennemis. . . . Vous ne savez donc pas ce que c'est que le patriotisme?'

'You see, my child, on the continent their minds are quite clear. When, if, they alter them, we might have a peace that is not *ersatz*.'

The Conferences jogged along happily, at pleasant spas, and sunny Riviera towns, but nothing much seemed to come of them. Reparations formed the chief topic, apparently, but there was a good deal about Security, and some rather shrill outcries about Armaments and Boundaries.

'Hot air!' said Georgie.

'Who cares, anyway?' asked Joan. 'Let's go to the pictures.'

That at least was a real gift to the post-war world. Everyone, however poor, could wallow in celluloid sentiment, or crime, or thrills, according to taste, and forget everything else for the moment. Georgie favoured crime, especially crime with well scattered clues; it occupied her mind; Joan always wanted thrills, speed, speed, more racing, more train wrecks, more

fighths in the air. All her conversation was sprinkled with references to Malcolm Campbell, Kaye Don, or Henry Segrave, or the speed records on land or water, or in the air. She drove her own sports model with reckless skill; she had her pilot's certificate; she seemed bent, to Stephen's worried eyes, on trying to break her neck; but she was not, she reassured him - only trying to break records. There alone she found effort worth while. 'They needed a super hero, and could not find him,' might have been the slogan of this age. And then Lindbergh flew the Atlantic, and became the hero of the youth of every land. What matter that two Englishmen had already done it; their achievement was damped down in the usual sober English fashion, but Lindbergh was the lad with wings, everybody's hero.

A little hero-worship did Joan good; she felt less inert beneath the burden of her passion for Stephen. After all, youth . . .

'I'm going to St. Moritz for the winter sports,' she said, 'Coming, Georgie?'

'No thanks,' Georgie said dreamily, 'I'd rather go to Italy to see the Fascisti at work.'

Joan blew in to see Aunt Alex in Paris. Alex never seemed to look a day older than she did the last time one saw her; she was still untidy, with hair like a bird's nest, bright cheeks, and brilliant eyes.

'She turns out very good stuff, you know,' Ronnie told Joan, 'not absolutely first rate, but the very cream of the second rate, and she's fairy godmother to half the Quarter, and happier than anyone I know. It fairly beats me that anyone so vital should be so utterly indifferent to sex. You're not.'

'Wrong again, Ronnie.'

'Don't tell me. I know you've got a perverted passion for your stepfather, but you'd soon get that knocked out if someone young swept you off your feet.'

'Like to try, Ronnie?'

'God! I would.'

'Carry on, then; I'm ready.'

'It's not as matter-of-fact as that, young woman. It depends upon the occasion, the place, the hour; one might almost say, the drink.'

'I'll meet you half way.'

'All right, but don't let Alex know. She'd go all moral if she knew her own lambs were not behaving with decorum.'

Joan enjoyed her affair with Ronnie; passion seemed to exorcize some of her restlessness. She was fond of her cousin, who, being to all intents and purposes a Frenchman, naturally regarded love-making as an art; his technique, Joan assured him, was marvellous.

But Ronnie was not quite a Frenchman; his love-making was not wholly due to art, and his passion for Joan had become a real one. She scoffed at the idea. 'I'll be off before we get tired of it,' she said, with her arms about his neck. 'Kiss, and don't tell, Ronnie. It's been heavenly.'

'Don't go yet, Joan. Marry me. Don't go at all.'

'Don't be soppy, my sweet. It was to pass an hour or two, but was never meant to last.'

'It was; it will.'

'Nonsense, my lamb. Passion's sweet, but not lasting.'

 'Light must we be
 With spirits light
 With touch light fingered
 Take all our pleasures,
 Take them and leave them.'

'Bye, Ronnie. You've given me a simply mah'v'lous time.'

CHAPTER IV

GEORGIE did not go to Italy. Aunt Vicky took fright, and told Maud that it would never do to let the girl run into danger. 'We don't want any more scandals,' she said, wistfully.

Doris had provided enough scandal to content a family with a greater taste for publicity than hers. That affair had been particularly unfortunate, as Doris's father, a year or two before, had given a remarkably brilliant series of sermons on 'The Sins of Society', which had brought him the most fashionable congregation in London. The Rev. Henry had delivered his sermons in all good faith, with a childlike trust that they would do good as well as provide entertainment; the scandalous tales about his daughter made the poor man look a humbug and a fraud. So Vicky pleaded for no more scandals.

Joan came back from St. Moritz looking radiant. Stephen was nervous; why couldn't the girl marry and settle down?

'Let's send them both to the States for a bit,' he suggested to his wife. 'The change may do Georgie good, and my sister would be delighted to have them.'

'I don't know that I want to go, Stephen,' said Georgie.

'Yes, you do, my lamb,' protested Joan. 'Thank you, Stephen. It will be great fun. We'll both go. Send a cable, and book the berths, angel.'

Georgie was terribly seasick, but Joan enjoyed the voyage. Her vitality was amazing, and like a magnet to every man on the ship. She swam, and played games, and danced, and danced, and had a very lively flirtation with two young Americans, and a rather more serious one with the young Earl of Loam, who was going to New York in search of an heiress, rumour said, and spoiling his chance of success by falling in love with Joan Font on the way. Joan liked him, not as she liked Stephen, not

as she liked Ronnie, but better than she had liked any man who might be regarded as a possible husband. Being a countess would suit her very well; she could fill the part very satisfactorily, if she gave her mind to it; she could hunt with 'Pug', which would keep him happy, and entertain for him in a way which would do him credit, and she wouldn't jib at providing him with a baby or two. It might do very well, if he were not too set upon this heiress.

He was sufficiently set upon the heiress not to propose to Joan during the voyage, but he made it abundantly clear that he hoped, and intended, to see a great deal of her in New York.

'I don't know, Pug,' Joan said casually. 'We've going to Philadelphia first. See you later. I must look after Georgie. She's been terribly ill.'

Reporters found the famous Font sisters very unsatisfactory; Joan was too absorbed in looking after her sister to give them any attention, and Georgie, asked what she thought of New York's skyline, only said pensively, 'I wonder why they set up the Statue of Liberty with her face towards Europe?'

Mary Blane Hansard welcomed them warmly, for her brother Stephen's sake, as well as for their own. Stephen had written 'I don't know what you will make of them, Maisie; they keep Maud and me in a perpetual state of bewilderment, but America produces up-to-date young people, too, I'm told, so you may understand them better than we do. They are dear but curious creatures, Maisie, as hard and bright as glass, but as brittle, I'm afraid.'

Mrs. Hansard had a lovely old Colonial house ten miles or so from Philadelphia, full of old coloured glass and mellow early American furniture, and an English, almost park-like garden, with magnificent trees, beyond which glittered the white walls of the house. She talked, as Stephen talked, in a soft Southern voice; in her home there was neither noise nor drunkenness, though its old, capacious cellars made prohibition seem a joke. Georgie would have stayed for ever with

the Hansards, but Joan wanted to see more of New York. Effie Hansard, the eldest daughter, had married a Wall Street magnate, and had a conspicuous house on Fifth Avenue.'

'Very old-fashioned, my dear,' Effie confided to Joan. 'No one lives on Fifth Avenue nowadays, but Warren is obstinate, and says he is European enough to be pleased to live in his father's house, instead of being a hundred per cent American, and not having a father at all.'

Effie was as anxious to give them a good time as her mother had been, but the good time, of course, meant feverish repetition of the latest forms of entertainment. To Georgie they seemed to consist of noises, each more shattering than the last, and of drinks, strange and potent, and of shrieking comments on clothes, and food, and dollars, and stocks and shares.

The sisters had a rather sensational success, which was due to their joint appearance rather than a tribute to either separately. Effie Hansard Troon introduced them to the fashionable world of New York at a great Picture Ball; Georgie, whose resemblance to Lady Hamilton had often been remarked, went as Romney's exquisite Bacchante, and Joan, with her cap of sleek black hair, went as her own portrait by Augustus John, an impish affair in black and scarlet, in which, with a tilt of eyebrows and a pointing of ears and chin, he had made her look like the traditional Mephistopheles. After that they never seemed to have a moment to themselves, or ever to be alone, unless Georgie, as she sometimes did, pleaded a headache to escape some women's luncheon party at which the heat and the noise and the chatter would be certain to give her the headache which she pleaded in advance.

Joan found New York monstrous, yet with a beauty of its own; futuristic, like Aunt Alex's pictures, angular, without softness or grace, the same beauty she found in Epstein and Stravinsky, and in a ferro-concrete skeleton rising into a blue sky.

New York seemed to Georgie rather like the monkey house

at the Zoo, to which was added an agonizing mechanical clamour, shriek, howl, bellow, clang. The chatter of the monkeys was reproduced very faithfully in the ladies of New York, expressing themselves with candour on every conceivable subject. Georgie, who had always said jestingly to Stephen that she wanted a dumb American - dumb in the English sense - for a husband, was less sure of the charms of American marriage when she viewed it at close quarters. After a year or two all the husbands seemed to be wedded to business, to regard their wives as spending machines for the money they made, and to look for happiness elsewhere. The women were sex-starved, hungry; how else could one account for their passionate absorption in futilities, their mania for women's clubs? Georgie regarded a club as a place in which you snatched a lunch when you were too busy to get home for it, or a tea when you were entertaining a friend who would not be welcomed by your parents, not as a spot round which all existence revolved.

Joan rather liked these curious functions. 'Imagine a large number of women in Europe gathering together constantly to eat meals and exchange views,' she said laughing. 'These women's clubs and societies and committees make me scream, Georgie. It's the funniest idea to have completely self-contained male and female worlds.'

'The males seem to have their uses,' said Georgie, dryly, re-arranging a great sheaf of American Beauty roses.

'You seem popular with them, Georgie,' Joan remarked. 'You've far more flowers than I have. It's a pretty custom.'

'They overdo it,' Georgie said ungratefully. 'I'd rather have a bunch of violets from Stephen; he knows just when I want them, and how.'

Joan was silent. Stephen seldom gave her flowers, but she had noticed how, when Georgie seemed more listless than usual, Stephen would bring her a bunch of violets or a spray of lilies of the valley. Had he sent great bouquets from a florist's, she

would have handed them to a maid for the drawing-room, but she carried the little bunches away to her bedroom and put them in the bowl of common pottery which John Bryant had given her, and which was always on the table by her bed. Stephen had a queer understanding of women's subtler whims.

Joan shook herself free from enervating memories. She was out to have a good time, not to dream of Stephen. She pushed the American Beauties aside impatiently, and faced Georgie purposefully.

'Do you want to make money, my lamb,' she asked.

'Money! What for?' Georgie asked in surprise.

Joan stared, and then laughed. 'You're incredible, my sweet. "Money. What for?" asks she, in the Land of the Dollar. You must re-read your Lorelei: "A kiss on the hand is all very well, but a diamond and sapphire bracelet lasts for ever."'

'We've plenty, haven't we?' Georgie asked vaguely, and without any real interest. 'If not, Stephen will cable some.'

'We have *not*, my lamb,' Joan said firmly. 'I want to marry "Pug" Loam, and if I'm to bring it off I must have money. Everyone here is making piles over shares of some kind or other. Effie paid for her last trip round the world out of her profits. Alice Dartry has just made enough to buy a steam yacht. I don't see why we shouldn't make a bit.'

'All right,' Georgie acquiesced, indifferently. 'It will be great fun. I'm having dinner to-night with that nice stock-broker - what's his name? Oh, I remember, Thistleton. I'll tell him we're beginning to think in millions, and what does he advise.'

Joan said no more about it, and she thought Georgie had forgotten the matter. Joan herself had staked all her allowance in a gamble in copper shares, and had made a handsome profit, but millions were elusive unless one began with large stakes, she found.

She was calculating her profits one afternoon a few weeks later, when she was shown into Alice Dartry's sitting-room.

'Mrs. Dartry has been detained,' the maid apologized. 'She hopes you will excuse her. She will not be long.'

Joan smiled, and nodded. Georgie was there already, with her nose flattened against a window. Opposite her was a skyscraper, bare, unwinking. 'How cold it is,' she thought, 'cold and dead.' Her mind called up a vision of King's Wimborne, long and low, of mellow Jacobean brick, warm, living, home. She was terribly homesick for green fields or red omnibuses, for English country peace or London's subdued roar. She twisted herself into a dozen uncomfortable positions, but in none of them could she see if there were stars in the sky. In New York she was constantly reminded of that German film 'Metropolis', inhuman, relentless, which had made her shudder.

Joan crossed the room to her side. 'Hullo,' said Georgie, drawing the curtain, 'Alice won't be long.'

She moved into the middle of the room. 'How I long for an open fire, with lumps of shiny coal, and the crackle of logs. I loathe steam heating. Let's go home.'

Joan looked worried. 'Wait a week or two, Georgie, there's a lamb.' I'm not quite ready yet.'

'Oh, all right,' was the listless answer. 'One place is very much like another, I suppose. Let me know when you're ready. Oh, Joan, I was forgetting. If it's anything to do with "Pug," I've made about seven hundred thousand dollars. Will that be enough to pay off the mortgage on Loam? or whatever it is he wants?'

Joan was pale. 'You've made *what*?'

'About seven hundred thousand dollars. It may be more by this time. It's been great fun, and I dare say I can make more if it's not enough.'

Joan stared. How like Georgie to be quite indifferent to money, and yet to gamble on the grand scale in this casual way! 'My lamb, what did you put it in?' she asked, with assumed carelessness.

'Margins, or something. It seems simple. Think of a number, and double it.'

'But if you'd lost you would have ruined Stephen.'

'It's nothing to do with Stephen. He couldn't be held responsible for my debts. Anyway, it looks as if I can't lose. I don't want it, Joan. Will it be enough for Pug?'

'I'll ask him.' Joan gave her sister the lightest butterfly kiss. 'Are you sure you don't want it, Georgie?'

'Quite sure. What good would it do me?'

'I don't know. There are lots of things.'

'I've all I want already.'

'Except the only thing you do want,' thought Joan.

They went to Harlem that evening, with Alice Dartry's party, which included Pug Loam. It was like travelling to another continent. New York City at night was as unreal as a dream, nothing but tier upon tier of lights against the sky – as if they hung there on invisible wires – and clash, and clatter, and clang. A wave of hysterical panic seized Georgie in the chasm-like streets. 'I must get out of here, I must get out of here,' hammered inside her head.

Harlem was as full of humanity as New York seemed drained of it. This, too, was full of noise, but the noise of voices instead of machines and barbaric music. A number of boys were dancing the Charleston in black doorways; the streets, after the glare of New York, were dark, in spite of the streams of light from cafés and shops. There seemed to be nothing but cafés and clothes stalls, and it was odd to see so few white faces in the crowded streets. Far from the impersonality of machines there was a subtle, sensual undercurrent of human vitality, quite indescribable, which was remarkably exciting and seemed to get into one's blood. Even Georgie felt it; Joan was frankly enthralled.

They went into some kind of café, open to the street, unguarded, which appeared to exist solely for the serving of cocktails, as if there were no such thing as Prohibition; there was

no mysterious password such as was needed in New York City, no serving of alcohol in soup cups, only cocktails, scores of them, brilliant-coloured, uncovered, and unashamed. Joan was a little drunk with excitement as well as with alcohol, but Georgie, who did not care for drink and yet could take an incredible quantity of it, was perfectly sober, only her mind was affected, washed free from vagueness, as clear as crystal. At the table next to her were four boys, quite charmingly dressed as girls; two were white and two were coloured; three of them were behaving just as white girls behaved in Manhattan, powdering their noses, rouging their lips and sipping their gin and vermouth as they cast languorous or provocative glances around them; the fourth was so drunk that it had forgotten all the conventions. Nobody paid any attention to them; they were evidently quite an ordinary spectacle. When someone put a coin in a slot and the automatic piano began to play, a coloured man - or was it a coloured woman dressed as a man? Georgie could not be quite sure - asked one of the white boy-girls to dance, and in a second they were whirling round the room together, dancing very gracefully, if a little suggestively, locked close in a passionate embrace.

A curious sight, thought Georgie dispassionately. She had seen it before, of course, in Berlin, and at a studio party in London; but never in a public place, open to the street, where any casual passer-by might enter, and in a company so mixed that it contained several matrons of unblemished reputation, débutantes of eighteen, who looked like rosebuds, and visitors like herself from other lands. Ridiculous to be shocked! If one did not like it one could stay away; if one took a detached, almost scientific, interest in the epicene and the perverted why carry on one's observations behind locked doors?

She turned to her neighbour. 'Do you know Paris?' He was, she saw, a little squiffy as he answered, 'Paris has nothing on us.'

'I believe you,' Georgie said negligently. 'I was thinking how singularly pure it was.'

He looked at her suspiciously, but her face was so expressionless that it left him baffled.

The noise was deafening, the room was thick with smoke which drifted up to the ceiling and hung there in a pungent cloud among the festoons of dirty crimson paper and dingy coloured balls. The automatic piano played incessantly, soulless, raucous jazz, as successive nickels were slipped into the slot. At the American-cloth-topped tables, half drunk, perspiring humanity was packed so close that it was difficult to move an elbow without digging someone in the ribs.

'A pitiable effort at gaiety,' thought Joan hazily, but Georgie felt that at any moment she might be sick. It was three o'clock in the morning; out on the pavement she drew a deep breath. 'Wasn't it Edgar Allan Poe who wrote, "I was not indeed ignorant of the flowers on the vine, but the cypress and the hemlock overshadowed me night and day"?' she asked, but nobody answered her or paid any heed. 'Now what made me say that?' asked Georgie thoughtfully. 'I must have seen it somewhere, I suppose.'

In the streets of Harlem there was a general air of melancholy where there was not feverish gaiety. Georgie walked on with her companion, who kept up a running commentary, of which she could not understand a word. Behind her Joan walked with Pug Loam.

'Found your heiress yet, Pug?' Joan was just drunk enough to have thrown away discretion.

'Nothing I could bear to sleep with,' Pug answered gloomily.

'Made anything on Wall Street?'

'A few thousands.'

'I've made 700,000 dollars,' said Joan casually.

Pug stopped dead. 'The devil you have!'

'Would that be enough for Ikey Mo, Pug?'

'More than enough, my sweet. I'm not very heavily dipped

and I've negotiated a deal for 300,000 dollars for a Gainsborough. I hate to part with the old girl, but there it is. One must live. Look here, Joan, we could manage if you can put up with me?"

'I think I can, Pug.'

'Good girl! That's settled, then. Let's go home.'

'Not just yet, Pug. We must go back to Philadelphia, and see Henry Ford, and take a peep at Hollywood. You toddle on ahead and get Loam out of pawn.'

Georgie was so thankful to leave New York that she assented almost cheerfully to Joan's travel plans, though she did not understand them.

'I want to give Pug time, at least a year, to make sure he does not repent of his bargain,' explained Joan briefly.

That sounded fair, if dangerous. 'I told Pug all my sins,' Joan added. Georgie gave her an affectionate squeeze. Sterling, this sister of hers, really, in spite of some odd incidents,

They travelled in leisurely fashion to give Pug time to be sure of his own mind, though he protested that it was quite firmly made up already. They went to Detroit to see the Ford factory, and were duly impressed; they saw Ford coal mines, Ford forests, Ford docks in a score of pamphlets, and revived a hazy memory of a Ford Peace Ship, a medieval gesture of faith, pathetic and rather fine. Mr. Henry Ford, they heard, was trying to revive old-fashioned dancing, cotillions and quadrilles.

As they motored away from Detroit they looked at the Canadian shore across the river, and Georgie felt a wave of homesickness; she heard rooks cawing, and her heart conjured up green fields and pale sunshine, the narrow winding roads and green spreading trees of England.

They spent the summer with the Hansards in Maine, and in the autumn turned westward. Joan wanted to have a film test in Hollywood, but Georgie was so completely disillusioned

that she refused to go near the studios. While Joan was being filmed she went to see Mrs. Aimée Semple McPherson's 'Angelus' Temple at Los Angeles, where they provided religion as variety turns in a garishly lit, flower-bedecked theatre, packed with excitable humanity eager to approach 'the Evangelist with the sex appeal', who bowed from the stage behind monstrous bouquets of roses and talked a good deal of nonsense - 'blasphemous nonsense' Georgie thought - into a microphone, but undoubtedly had as great a gift for showmanship as C. B. Cochran himself.

Georgie was still, intermittently, interested in religion. 'Why can't I accept any faith that is offered to me?' she thought. 'I long to, but I can't. The more I long the more difficult it is, because I am always afraid that it's the desire to believe which has become too much for me. If there is nothing for me among all the religions of America, there's not much hope.'

She could not feel convinced even of the survival of personality; her more hopeful moments supplied a belief in some form of absorption into the universal, but as a rule she looked forward into emptiness, a blackening out.

In Los Angeles they heard disquieting tales of the antics of the stock market. Had Pug used his winnings to release Loam? Joan thought so, but was not sure.

'It's time we went home,' said Georgie firmly. And now Joan thought so, too.

CHAPTER V

PUG had used his money sensibly, Georgie's was idle but safe in the bank. Stephen was caught in the financial storm. With a crash which shook the world the stock market tumbled.

When they thought that the worst was over, though in point of fact it was not, they held a family council.

'We must sell this house and King's Wimborne,' said Maud.

'And our boots and beds, and live on a crust in Rowton House, Maud,' said Stephen, laughing. 'You're not thorough enough.'

'How bad is it, Stephen?' asked Georgie quietly.

'Not nearly as bad as that, my dear child. This house and King's Wimborne cost a lot to keep up, the taxation is appalling, but if we could let them for a time and live in a flat somewhere, till things pick up again, your mother need not part with her shoes and bed.'

'Houses are difficult to let. You'd better sell, Stephen. After all, we don't need such big houses, at least we three don't; Joan's going to have her own, and Sheila's American. The houses ought to go to the Grants when we are dead, and we don't like them much, so why not sell?'

Maud was deeply distressed. 'I thought you loved your home, Georgie.'

'So I do, mummy, but not as much as some other things.'

Maud was puzzled, but Stephen thought he understood. Joan crossed the room and put her arm carelessly over Georgie's shoulder. 'We've more than three-quarters of a million dollars in the bank. Wouldn't that be enough to pull us out of our immediate bothers, Stephen?'

Georgie gulped; Stephen flushed.

'My darling child . . .' Maud began gratefully, but Georgie interrupted:

'I'm sorry, Stephen, that's my money, and, unless something awful is threatening, it's not available.'

'Georgie,' Joan began angrily. Stephen leant over the table and took Georgie's hand. 'My dearest girl, I don't need it, and I think it has been very wisely bestowed.'

Georgie gave his hand a squeeze. 'Thank you, Stephen. You're a darling. You always understand without a lot of explanations. That's settled, then. Put the houses up for sale, but not, my lambs, I beseech you, before Joan's wedding.'

Georgie ruffled her mother's hair and gave her a little kiss as she went out of the room. But Maud was hurt; *she* needed explanations, and they did not give them to her; her husband and her children were leagued to treat her like a child. The fact was, that they knew her for an incorrigible sentimentalist, and, in love, left her with her illusions; Maud would not have enjoyed hearing that Joan's money was essential for her marriage with Pug Loam.

The stock market continued to tumble; financiers vanished into gaols or eternity; American banks closed; taxation continued to mount; there was a Labour Government, a war, of a kind, in China, and, as usual, a great deal of talk. Stephen murmured comments on Locarno, and, presently, on Lausanne, but his family was not much interested until a National Government emerged with a great deal of flag-wagging and England slid off the gold standard. Atlantic flights and Amy Jonhson's air trip to Australia thrilled Joan momentarily; nothing seemed to interest Georgie except newspaper - generally inaccurate - comments on experiments with serums, and preparations for Joan's wedding, and anything particularly sensational in the way of murder mysteries, notably the Lindbergh baby case.

What was the matter with these children? Stephen wondered miserably; they only looked on curiously at life without any vital interest in it, never *did* anything; they seemed to have no sand. Georgie could write, but she never bothered, except to put her name, in a fashionable weekly, to some gossiping para-



GEORGIE CHOSE A FROCK FROM *VOGUE*

[*Vogue* pattern No 205]

graphs which another poor devil had to write. Joan might have bought an aeroplane and beaten Amy Johnson at that game, but she would not be bothered; it was more fun to look on. It was not that they had no vitality, Joan, at least, had plenty; they had no *will* to do anything, except drift with the tide. He could do nothing but hope that a miracle might change them and pray that his own little daughter might escape the taint.

Georgie, wishing to discuss some detail of bridesmaids' dresses with Aunt Vicky, called unexpectedly at her Aunt's house at Rutland Gate.

'Don't bother to announce me, Morton,' she said to the parlourmaid. 'I've only come for five minutes. Is Aunt Vicky in the drawing-room?'

'Yes, Miss Georgie,' the maid answered smiling. Georgie had her great-grandmother's gift for inspiring fervent passions in maids. There was a murmur of voices in the drawing-room – no one of importance or Morton would have warned her. Georgie tapped at the door and went in. For a moment she blinked as if the sun were in her eyes. John Bryant had risen from a low chair and was facing her across the room. She turned very pale and put her hand on the back of a chair to steady herself. He walked down the long room to meet her. For a little longer than convention demanded he held her hand.

'How are you, John?' she asked huskily.

'Splendid. How are you?'

Vicky poured out tea and kept up a lively stream of chatter about New York and Joan's wedding, presently shunting the conversation tactfully into the impersonal safety of John's laboratory experiments.

'I believe I'm on the right track at last,' he acknowledged modestly.

Morton came in to call Vicky to the telephone; she cast a quick, whimsical glance at her two visitors, and rose. 'Excuse me, both of you. I won't be a minute.'

John walked down the room with her, opened the door, and stood there thoughtfully, for a second. Georgie's eyes followed him, travelling slowly from his head to his feet as if to memorize details she would never see again; his hair was turning grey; he stooped a little; his coat needed brushing, and he had a hole in his sock. That little, ridiculous, detail wrung her heart; he needed her; he was neglected; no one darned his socks.

He came back and sat down next to her, his hands clasped round his knees.

'You've not changed, Georgie.'

'Oh! John, you know I have. I'm dead, withered.'

'My dear!' He took her hand. 'I did not mean to harm you.'

'I know, John. There are so many people who can love lightly. It just happened that I was not one.'

'Forgive me. I'm damaged, too.'

'Poor John! No one looks after you?'

'I've a pretty good man at Mottarone; no women, if that's what you mean.'

'Wouldn't you be happier with one?'

'Only with one, my dear. It's been wonderful to see you, but it's a good thing I am going back to-morrow.'

'Are you sure, John?'

'A wise man flees from temptation when he knows he's weak.'

'It's still a temptation?'

'Intolerable.'

Vicky came back with a great deal of clatter. 'If you are coming with us to that dinner, John, you will have to hurry,' she said. 'Georgie, my dear, we could take you if you'd like to come?'

Georgie hesitated. 'No, thank you, Aunt Vicky. There's such a lot to do. Mummy's struggling with correspondence, I can't leave her to cope with it alone. I'll see you at the wedding, if you don't blow in before. Good-bye, John, it's so nice to have seen you again.'

At the door he held her hand between both of his. 'Good-bye, Georgie.'

'Au revoir, John.'

Joan gave a party on the night before her wedding, scoffing at her mother's injunctions to go early to bed. It was a riotous party at the Monseigneur, with oceans of champagne.

'I don't wanta go to bed, I don't wanta to go to bed.'

Oh me, Oh my,

I don't wanta go to bed,'

boomed the band.

'I could dance till daybreak,' said Joan. 'Let's go on somewhere.'

Georgie left early; she had a headache, and did not care about Joan's friends. Stephen had been called away unexpectedly and she found her mother alone in the library, sitting by the fire with a book on her knee.

'Poor darling,' thought Georgie. 'Joan might have pandered to her sentimentality for once.' She picked up the book and laughed softly; Maud, the sentimentalist, was reading *Candide*.

'I know all that, but we must cultivate our garden,' was underlined. Charlotte's lesson. Georgiana's lesson. The indecision which had kept Georgie on a knife-edge of torture for days was blown away like mist in the path of an east wind. She turned the page:

'Let us work without cavilling; it is the only way to make life supportable,' said Martin.

'Of course,' thought Georgie. 'It's the obvious job for me to do.'

'I'm ashamed of you, mummy,' she said aloud. 'Reading an English translation, indeed.'

She went to the bookcase and pulled out Charlotte's copy.

'May I have this to keep?' she asked.

'Funny child!' said Maud. 'You'll take care of it?'

'I'll treasure it, mummy. Good-night, my lamb. Is Stephen likely to be late?'

know that she had been right and that John was worth any price she might be called upon to pay. It would be a big one; John himself would prove difficult, her mother would plead, Stephen would reason, only Joan would give her unqualified support. Maud would think, and would go on thinking for a long time, that her heart was broken, but it would not, really, be irreparably damaged; she had Sheila, and Sheila would prove a great comfort, for she gave promise of being the most satisfactory of children, perfectly ordinary in every respect, without whims or moods, with no dark, incalculable streak. 'And I shan't hurt Sheila,' thought Georgie thankfully. 'She's American and more impervious to shocks than we are, less brittle, Stephen would say. The future is theirs, which must be an agreeable fact to contemplate. Poor Stephen! he will take it to heart. Heavens, it's nearly morning. What a hag I shall look.'

Her maid woke her at half-past eight. 'Shall I take Miss Joan her tea, miss?'

'No, Mary, I will.'

Joan was sleeping very happily, as if the day held no more for her than a game of golf. Georgie sat on the side of the bed and shook her gently. Joan opened eyes that filled with laughter as soon as she was really awake. 'A solemn occasion, my lamb, I'm glad you're the first to bring me your blessing.'

'Are you happy, Joan?'

'As happy as it's good for mortals to be; there's nothing of heaven in it.'

'You don't want to get out of it?'

'Not a scrap, my sweet. Pug and I will rub along together very well. We've both sown a wild oat or two, and now propose to cultivate a garden crop. You'll come and stay with us, Georgie?'

'I don't think so, Joan?'

Joan sat up suddenly. 'So you've made up your mind, have

THE PRETTIEST WEDDING 1932

you? I never could understand why you did not bolt long ago.'

Georgie was silent, fearful of tears. Joan pulled her down beside her. 'Yes I do understand why you didn't. Because of me. You were afraid it would spoil my chances. You're a darling, Georgie. If there's any affection in me you have it all, you know, except that twisted bit that's Stephen's. Odd creatures, women! Now I'm safely settled and you can't do me any harm you're going. I think you're wise, since it's that one and no other for you. Be happy, Georgie; you deserve to be. I'll murder John if he's not good to you. When are you going? To-day?'

Georgie laughed shakily. 'In the night, darling, while the house still slumbers, leaving a note on my pincushion in the good old way. I ought to be in Italy before you and Pug reach Spain.'

'Good idea. Mother can shed two lots of tears together.'

'Don't be unkind, Joan.'

'I'm not, my lamb, only without illusions. You know as well as I do that mother, like most sentimentalists, can bear a good deal without suffering mortal wounds. They get a kind of inverted pleasure out of sorrow, and a warming, though quite unconscious, feeling of self-righteousness when they lament our hardness.'

Joan's golden bridal at St. Margaret's, Westminster, was a wonderful spectacle, cloth of gold, and veils of golden gauze; great sheaves of yellow lilies, and pale sunshine, which, somehow, seemed more golden than if it had been bright. 'The prettiest wedding of the year,' was the general verdict of a large and fashionable audience, as well as of the vast crowd gathered outside the church. Joan winked at Georgie.

When they were gone, Joan with an almost convulsive hug for her sister, the house seemed empty. A group of beggars lingered in the square; Georgie, still in her golden dress, opened the window and threw out a handful of pennies. There

was music somewhere in the square, a violinist, far too good to be a street musician by compulsion, was playing operatic airs. He should be playing, Georgie thought ironically, Joan's music from *Der Rosenkavalier*, but though he did not play anything as apt as that, his music was unconsciously well chosen: 'Connais tu le pays où fleurit l'oranger?' crooned the strings. Georgie laughed:

'That suits me very well.'

At six o'clock next morning she crept quietly down the stairs with her suit-case and let herself out into the square. The house was still in darkness, though she heard someone stirring in the kitchen and hoped that she had not been heard. The square was empty, too; no one had seen her go. She walked down Berkeley Street into Piccadilly and crossed the road to the Park. Last night's posters were still against the railings: 'Amy's Last Hop' and 'U.S.A. and War Debts', four of the first and one of the second. An odd world in which the exploit of a plucky girl appeared so much more important than all civilization on the point of slipping into the abyss!

London was at its enchanting best in the early morning of a bright day; grey and pearl and pale golden sunshine gave the old city an air of deceptive innocence. Georgie, who loved it in all its moods, had a lump in her throat as she said farewell to it. Never again would she be part of it, she would only come as a visitor. An errand boy went past on a bicycle whistling 'Auf Wiedersehn'. A taxi dawdled along behind him and she hailed it. She must not stay within hail of Berkeley Square until it was time to catch the boat train. Nearly two hours to wait, plenty of time for poor Stephen to do his frantic best to find her and exhaust all argument, if, by any chance, her maid should go to call her early and find the letter she had left.

The taxi-driver opened the door and put her suit-case inside. 'Where to, miss?'

Georgie gave him one of her brilliant smiles. 'I'm leaving

GOOD-BYE TO LONDON 1932

London for a long time, and want to say good-bye to it before you take me to Waterloo for the boat train.'

'What would you like to see, miss?'

'St. Paul's and Westminster and the Albert Memorial. Yes, I think I'll see the Albert Memorial first.'

The taxi slid past the Green Park railings, down the wide road to the west. Georgie pulled an apple out of her coat pocket and thoughtfully took a bite.

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